

Tadasana or Samasthiti



Mountain Pose

[taahd-AAH-suh-nuh] or [suhm-uhst-HEE-tuh-hee]

In Sanskrit, *tada* means “mountain”; *sama* means “upright,” “straight,” or “unmoved”; and *sthiti* means “steadiness.” The name Tadasana is used in Iyengar and most eclectic hatha classes, whereas Samasthiti is used mostly by Ashtanga (power) yogis. A few yoga schools call this pose Talasana, a word for “tree,” but it should not be confused with Vrksahasana (Tree Pose), which is the more common one-legged balance pose.

DESCRIPTION

Tadasana provides the foundation for all standing poses. It is generally performed at the beginning of a practice in order to direct the student’s focus internally and to begin warming the muscles for further practice. We begin with the feet—the base of the body—to highlight the importance of a strong, balanced foundation.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root equally through the metatarsal heads and the center of the heel in both feet.

BENEFITS

- Builds symmetry and balance in body alignment and overall posture.
- Tones the lower extremities.
- Strengthens the arches.
- Improves strength in the spinal and abdominal musculature.
- Improves overall posture.

VERBAL CUES

- As with all poses, begin by bringing your focus to your breath. Slow down and deepen your breath as you center your mind within yourself; let your thoughts settle out of the forefront of your consciousness as you continue to breathe deeply.
- Begin with your feet parallel, as close together as is comfortable, and your toes pointing straight ahead. Spread your toes and feel the length of each toe against the ground; doing so prevents your toes from curling under and cramping your feet. Imagine your toes rooting outward and down, enhancing your stability.
- Anchor through your big toes, your little toes, and the middle of your heels. Balance your body weight equally between the feet. Imagine that you are breathing in through your arches to help them lift slightly.
- Firm your thigh muscles as you gently lift your kneecaps upward without locking your knee joints. Your legs should remain long and strong but with slightly soft knees. Begin to rotate your upper legs inward and your lower legs slightly outward. Your legs will not actually rotate much in either direction, but you will become more aware of the energy of your leg muscles in the process. Imagine an upward flow of energy from your arches along your inner legs into your pelvis.
- Continue to focus on your breath.



- Keep your pelvis in a neutral position so that the top of your pelvis is parallel to the ground. Center your hips so they align more directly over your heels and find the place where you have to work a bit to stay balanced without forcing or straining.
- Keep your chest lifted (without arching your back), your shoulders relaxed, and your spine lengthened. With each inhalation, feel your rib cage lift slightly away from your pelvis and imagine the energy from your feet moving higher through your body toward the crown of your head.
- Draw your shoulder blades together slightly to allow your chest to open more fully, with your arms relaxed alongside your body and your fingertips pointed down toward the ground. Your palms should face either slightly forward or toward your thighs
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Keep your chin parallel to the ground, or slightly tilted downward, and imagine someone gently lifting your skull away from your shoulders.
- Keep your ears, shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles in a comfortable, not overly rigid alignment. Imagine a straight line of energy running up and down the side of your body through each of these joints.
- As you continue to breathe deeply, eliminate any thoughts other than those that have to do with your alignment and your breath, and simply notice the physical and energetic movements in your body.
- When your awareness becomes fully present in this asana, you have the key to practicing all asanas. The extension to grow in this pose comes from deep in the mid back, and from this position the entirety of your daily posture improves.

ADJUSTMENTS

Arches—Direct the student to roll the inner (medial) ankles outward to lift the arches. You can brush your hand in the direction in which you instruct the student to move the ankle, or you can place your fingers between the ground and the arch of the foot to illustrate more space beneath the arch.

Hips—Stand behind the student. Center the hips more directly over the heels by placing your hands lightly on the student's hips at the iliac crest (top of the pelvis) and gently guiding the hips into alignment over the heels.

Shoulders—Stand to the side of the student and check shoulder positioning while cueing the student to relax the shoulders. Place your hands between the lifted shoulder blades (mid-trapezius muscles) and guide the shoulders down away from the ears. You can also touch the mid-chest (mid-sternal) area to encourage the chest to lift slightly, making sure that the student does not begin to arch the lower back by lifting too forcefully.

Head and neck—Place your fingertips under the student's chin or on the forehead and your thumbs at the base of the skull behind the ears. Lightly suggest more length in the neck by softly lifting the head. Gently guide the head back so that the ears align comfortably over the shoulders.



Adjustment: lifted shoulders.

MODIFICATIONS

Pregnancy—Instruct students to stand with the feet as wide apart as needed and in a position that is comfortable enough to accommodate the belly and help them maintain balance. If balance is compromised, advise them to use a wall or other sturdy prop.

Lordosis—Students with this condition (extreme forward pelvic tilt) may need tangible feedback to move into a more fully aligned Tadasana. It helps to have them stand against a wall and move the low back toward the wall in order to feel the action of bringing the pelvis into a more neutral position (where the anterior superior iliac spine [ASIS], the hip “points” located at the front of the pelvis, and pubic bone align vertically).

Kyphosis—For students with this condition (extreme upper back curvature), place the back against a wall with a pillow at the posterior bottom ribs while assisting them in pressing the shoulders back toward the wall. This modification can also benefit people with extremely tight pectoral (chest) and anterior deltoid (front shoulder) muscles achieve more awareness and open up more space in these areas.

Weakness, fatigue, or paralysis—Students can place the hands on the back of a chair for support while standing, or sit instead of standing, and focus on lengthening the spine.

Severe balance concerns—Students can stand with the back in front of a wall and use it in the way that a child who is learning how to ride a bicycle uses a training wheel. Specifically, they can press against the wall with the hands for stability. Eventually, as balance improves, the rest of the body works with more synergy and the hands and arms are used less for support.

KINEMATICS

To the outside observer, Tadasana may appear to be nothing more than relaxed standing in the anatomical position; in actuality, it is slightly more active. Electromyographic studies on standing posture indicate that human beings produce a rather minimal amount of muscular activity while standing in a relaxed, upright posture (Basmajian 1985). In Tadasana, however, the muscular activity is focused on consciously attaining and maintaining length in the entire body and is generally isometric in nature.

Mechanically, if the base of the body is not aligned properly, compensations must be made higher up the body in order to achieve proper balance. For example, if you stand with your shoulders rolling forward and toward each other, your neck tends to hyperextend to keep your head in a more upright posture. These compensatory changes create poor overall posture, which, in the long term, may lead to many physical and emotional concerns.

Tadasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)
Lower leg	Slight external rotation of lower leg	Peroneus longus, brevis, and tertius (I)
	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Gastrocnemius, anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)
Thigh	Knee extension and patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)
	Thigh extension	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (I)
	Slight internal rotation of femur	Adductors, gluteus medius, gluteus minimus (C, I)
Hip and pelvis	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)
	Hip stability	Gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators* (I)
Torso	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)
	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae (C, I)
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)
Shoulder	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis (I)

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

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



Vrkshasana

Tree Pose

[vrick-SHAAH-suh-nuh]

Vrksha is the Sanskrit word for “tree.” In Vrkshasana, the one-legged balance is reminiscent of the strength and energy in the trunk of a tree. The roots, represented by the standing foot, press down into the earth for support, and the branches or hands extend up ever taller toward the sun. Standing as a tree, you are strategically balanced so that energy comes up to your standing foot from the earth and you use gravity to your advantage as you press downward.

Many trees have roots on top of the earth, but the roots anchor into the ground. The part of Vrkshasana that represents roots anchoring into the ground is the force, or energy, exerted by gravity on the standing foot. Reciprocally, energy is drawn upward through the trunk of the body, while the arms stretching overhead are like branches reaching for the sun. This action allows the ribs to lift and expand the diaphragm, thus enabling more expansive breaths.

DESCRIPTION

Vrkshasana, like all single-legged balance postures, should be practiced equally on both legs. Vrkshasana and Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle) work well together because of the muscular engagement needed to stabilize and open the hips. In fact, many people prefer practicing Utthita Trikonasana before Vrkshasana to prepare the hips for deeper external rotation.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

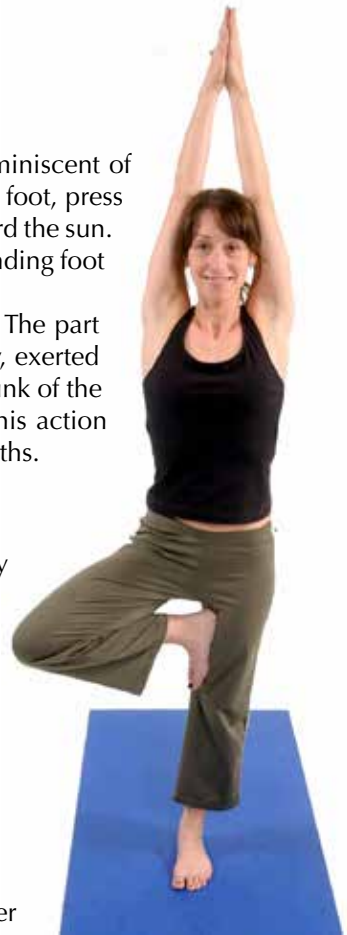
First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the metatarsal heads and the heel of the standing foot. Press the inner thigh of the standing leg and the sole of the non-weight-bearing foot toward each other.

BENEFITS

- Builds concentration, focus, and postural balance.
- Reduces stress—it is nearly impossible to worry and remain balanced at the same time.
- Develops strength and stability in the feet and ankles.
- Stabilizes and strengthens both superficial and deep hip muscles.
- Is said to balance the pituitary gland because of the pressure on the first metatarsal for balance (pressure that in reflexology is said to affect the structures in the neck and head).
- Increases overall body strength.



⚠ CAUTION

High blood pressure—Students with this condition should refrain from lifting the arms overhead.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), find a point somewhere in front of you to focus on with your eyes turned slightly downward. Gaze forward on a motionless *drishti* and allow your eyes to remain softly fixed on the chosen point. Breathe deeply and feel your body come into alignment.
- Slowly and smoothly, shift your body weight more fully onto your right leg and begin to lift your left heel off the ground. When you feel stable on your right leg, exhale and draw your left knee up toward your chest. Find the balance on your right foot from front to back, redirecting the movement that naturally moves the body from side to side when standing on one leg.
- Connect even more fully into your right leg, feeling the energy from the ground lengthen your spine and being mindful not to let the left side of your pelvis drop lower than the right side.
- Keep your right hip pressed back; at first, it may feel almost as if you are overcompensating. Keep your pelvis square while you externally rotate your left knee out to your left side. Feel the front of your right thigh and the inside of your left knee reaching away from each other.
- Exhale and place the sole of your left foot on the inside of your right leg anywhere that you feel you are comfortably, yet challengingly, balanced. However, avoid placing the foot on the inner knee joint. Firmly press your left foot and your right leg into each other. Doing so helps draw energy into the midline of your body and helps you maintain balance.
- Moving slowly, place your hands in Anjali Mudra (Prayer Pose) with your palms pressed lightly together at the level of your heart. Remaining fully rooted to the ground, imagine all the energy in your body drawing inward toward the midline and upward toward the sky.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- As you breathe in, slowly raise your arms overhead and feel your chest and ribs lift higher, away from your hips. Remain here for two to three more breaths.
- Slowly release your arms to your sides and set your left foot on the ground. Rotate your right foot in both directions and shake your leg out slightly to loosen up the joints of your right leg. Come back to Tadasana to prepare for the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Toes—Remind students to spread the toes for stability and to focus on keeping the balance between the front and back of the foot without clenching the toes. For a kinesthetic reminder, point to or lightly brush the tops of the toes. You can also press down into the first metatarsal (big toe) to help the student work from front to back instead of wobbling from side to side.

Hip of non-weight-bearing leg—Stand behind the student and place your hands lightly on the hips as you level them. Move slowly so that the student is not thrown off balance. If necessary, move the hip of the standing leg back into alignment over the knee.

Spine—Encourage length in the low spine by reminding students to lift the crown of the head toward the sky. You can lightly brush upward in the space between the shoulder blades.

Chest and ribs—Stand behind the student, placing your palms against the sides of the rib cage, and gently draw the ribs up. Alternatively, hold the student's upper arms so that you can support the student while promoting extension through the spine. Encourage the student to keep the pinky fingers touching as the arms are raised in order to maintain external rotation at the shoulders and keep the chest open. Standing behind the student works best because it requires little physical effort on your part and is less distracting to the student.

Shoulders—Place your hands lightly on top of the student's shoulders and remind the student to stay relaxed.



Adjustment: hip alignment.

MODIFICATIONS

Hip replacement—To avoid creating stress in the hip joint with its limited range of motion, instruct the student to focus solely on balancing on one leg with little if any external rotation of the bent leg. Invite the student to keep the toes on the ground and rotate on the ball of the foot to the first point of resistance in the hip.

Balance difficulty—Instruct students to keep the toes of the bent leg on the ground with the heel pressed against the straight leg or on a block to the side of the standing leg. Have students use a prop (chair or wall) as a sort of training wheel—that is, only as a way to regain balance if they tend to wobble.

Severe balance difficulty—Instruct students to place the foot of the bent leg on a block or step stool. This technique helps students work on opening the hips without compromising balance.

Pose deepening—Instead of placing the foot of the bent knee against the standing leg, direct the student to reach the foot across to the opposite hip into Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus) and wrap the same-side hand behind the back to hold the foot. If the student cannot quite reach the foot, she or he can use a strap.



Modification: balance difficulties.



Modification: pose deepening.

KINEMATICS

Students often complain that the inside of the standing thigh is “too slippery” and that they are therefore unable to hold the other foot against it. Generally, the problem does not really involve slippery pants or skin; rather, it is a matter either of not pressing the sole of the foot firmly into the opposite thigh or of not having adequate range of motion for that particular placement. If a student has enough flexibility and openness in the inner thigh to place the heel of the foot into the groin, he or she will gain significant stability in the posture.

Vrkshasana (Standing on Right Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Active muscles	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe abduction, stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus, hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Gastrocnemius, anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
	Knee extension, stability	Gastrocnemius (I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus, hallucis longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee extension and patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	
	Stability and adduction (adductor magnus helping to extend knee)	Adductors (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Active muscles	Muscles released
Thigh (L)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip extension, stability	Hamstrings (C, I)	
	Hip stability	Gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus; deep external rotators* (C, I)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	Adductors
	Hip external rotation	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)	
Shoulder	Adduction of scapulae	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back and downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Abduction of humerus	Deltoids (C, I)	
	Depression of humeral head	Infraspinatus, teres minor, subscapularis (C, I)	
Lower arm	Pronation	Pronator teres, pronator quadratus (C, I)	
	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis (I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Utkata Konasana

Fire Angle Pose

[OOT-kuh-tuh kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

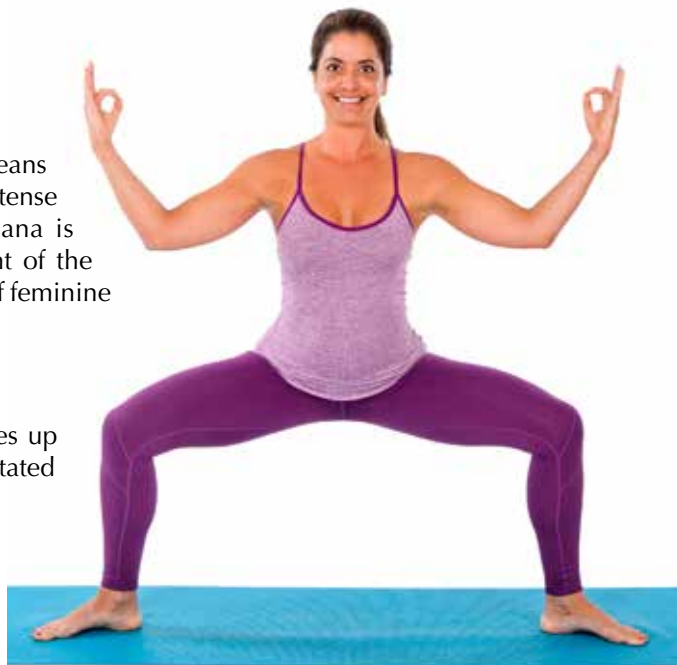
In Sanskrit, *utka* means “fierce” or “intense” and *kona* means “angle.” This wide-legged squat gets its name from the intense energy used in the thighs to hold the position. The asana is also often called Goddess Pose because it is reminiscent of the commanding stance of strength depicted in many statues of feminine deities.

DESCRIPTION

Utkata Konasana is a powerful squatting pose that charges up the energy of the hips and legs. The more the legs are rotated externally, the more the balance is affected.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy



FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the heels and the fifth metatarsal heads. Anchor into the first metatarsal heads and draw energy through an invisible line down from the base of the pelvis into the ground.

BENEFITS

- Opens and strengthens the hips and groin.
- Strengthens the entire thigh and the upper body.
- Stabilizes the knee joints.
- Serves as a beneficial pose during pregnancy due to the pelvic opening.
- Increases overall body strength.

⚠ CAUTION

Knee or hip surgery—Persons who have had knee or hip surgery should refrain from this pose until range of motion is reestablished, then proceed with modifications if medically appropriate.

VERBAL CUES

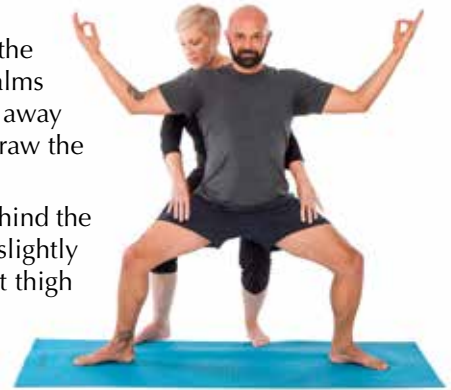
- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), step your legs as wide apart as is comfortable. Externally rotate the front of your thighs, knees, and feet outward. Make sure that your knees are aligned in the same direction as your toes. Visualize your kneecaps pointing directly away from each other.
- Inhale and raise your arms out to your sides so that they are parallel to the ground with your palms facing down. Keep your shoulders soft. Exhale and flex your hips, knees, and ankles, coming into a semi-squat.
- Establish that your kneecaps are pointing in the same direction as your toes, and on the next exhalation squat deeper. Breathe smoothly. Feel your outer hip muscles work to help open up more space between your inner thighs. Picture the outsides of your knees and thighs pressing into an imaginary wall behind you.

- Squat deeper until your upper thighs come as close to parallel with the ground as is comfortable for you. Feel your hamstrings (the backs of your thighs) and gluteal muscles (buttocks) contracting by imagining your heels drawing together. Visualize the strong energy holding your thighs in place. Breathe length through your back and sides while keeping your hips centered under your shoulders.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Press energy from your heart center out through your hands. Spread your fingers. If your arms fatigue, press your palms together in front of your heart or place your hands on your hips.
- Inhale and reach your arms overhead as you straighten your legs. Exhale and lower your arms back to your sides. Prepare for the next pose.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet and knees—If a student's knees rotate inward out of alignment with the toes, semi-squat behind the student and slightly to one side. Place your palms to the inside of the thighs, just above the knees, and gently press the knees away from each other. Instruct the student to use the outer hip muscles to help draw the thighs away from your hands.

Pelvis—If a student's hips are thrust back so that the pelvis is considerably behind the line of the shoulders, stand directly behind the student and turn your body slightly sideways with your knees somewhat bent. Press the outside of your closest thigh against the student's pelvis. Place your hands on the front of the student's shoulders and encourage him or her to draw the backs of the shoulders toward you as you support the movement. Move slowly so that you both keep your balance.



Adjustment: feet and knees.

Spine—If the student rounds the back as he or she squats, encourage length in the spine by cueing the student to lift the crown of the head toward the sky. Stand behind the student and place your hands lightly on the shoulder blades. Ask the student to draw the upper back into your hands.

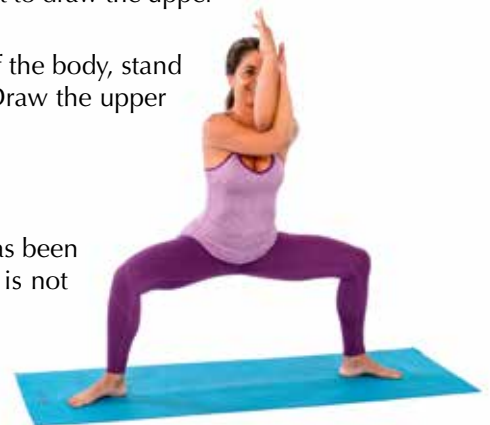
Shoulders—If the chest is flexed so that the arms are not in line with sides of the body, stand behind the student and place your hands lightly on top of the shoulders. Draw the upper arms slightly back to open the chest.

MODIFICATIONS

Hip or knee replacement—This pose may be practiced only if the student has been medically cleared to work on range of motion and if the external rotation is not taken to the extreme. Place the student near a wall for stability.

Balance difficulty or pregnancy—Invite the student to practice with the back against a wall while pressing the outer thighs toward the wall.

Pose deepening—If the student is comfortable practicing with the knees flexed at 90 degrees, invite her or him to bring the arms into Garudasana (Eagle Pose).



Modification: deepening the pose with arm variation.

KINEMATICS

This pose is energizing and powerful, and it is a good pose for women to practice during pregnancy; in fact, the delivery process is often aided by the attention to pelvic opening and strengthening. The pose is also grounding and highly beneficial for students who are not pregnant. In addition to holding the pose statically, students can slowly flex and extend the legs in a rhythmic pattern to dynamically increase lower-body strength. Practicing the pose in a dynamic manner can gradually increase stamina and range of motion in the legs. Ensure that the patella aligns with the foot to avoid straining the inner knee structures.

Utkata Konasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
Lower Leg	Ankle dorsiflexion, stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus (E, I)	
	Stability	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion, stability	Quadriceps, rectus femoris (E, I)	
	Knee stability	Hamstrings, popliteus (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus, adductors, iliopsoas (E, I)	
	Hip external rotation	Gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators* (C, I)	Adductors
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
	Hip external rotation	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)	
Shoulder	Humerus abduction and stability	Deltoids, infraspinatus, teres minor, supraspinatus, pectoralis major (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back and downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius, subscapularis (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Abduction of humerus	Deltoids (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Lower arm	Pronation	Pronator teres, pronator quadratus (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis (I)	

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

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

Utthita Trikonasana



Extended Triangle

[oot-T-HEE-tuh tree-kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *utthita* means “extended” or “stretched,” *tri* means “three,” and *kona* means “angle.” The posture is named for the triangle formed by the extended legs and the side bend in the body.

DESCRIPTION

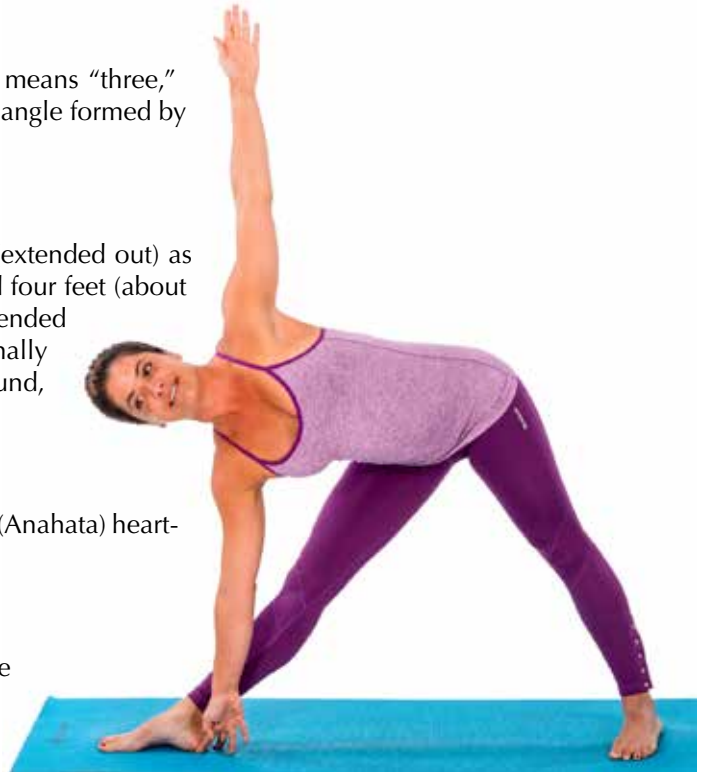
From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), the legs are abducted (extended out) as far apart as is comfortable, preferably between three and four feet (about one meter), with one leg externally rotated. Arms are extended out to the sides. The torso tilts laterally toward the externally rotated leg so the arms are then perpendicular to the ground, creating many triangles in the body's geometry.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the heel and the first metatarsal head of the front foot (of the externally rotated leg). Anchor into the outer edge and heel of the back foot. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.



BENEFITS

- Tones the legs and strengthens the ankles.
- Loosens the hip joints, groin, and hamstrings.
- Stabilizes and opens the hip joints when the pelvis is aligned properly.
- Helps release the spinal musculature.
- Opens the chest and shoulders.
- Strengthens and aligns the neck.
- Stimulates abdominal organs and improves digestion as it tones the abdominals.
- Aids in stress relief.

⚠️ CAUTIONS

Heart conditions and high blood pressure—Instruct the student to turn the gaze downward and keep the upper arm on the hip.

Neck pain or injury—Direct the student to continue to gaze forward without turning the neck.

Shoulder concerns—Instruct the student to keep the top hand on the hip and continue to rotate the shoulder back.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), inhale and extend your arms out to your sides with your palms facing downward.
- Step your legs apart, trying to place your feet as far apart as your outstretched hands, or as far apart as is comfortable to you.
- Externally rotate your right leg out slightly more than 90 degrees, then internally rotate your left leg toward your right heel about 45 degrees. Imagine a straight line drawn back from your right heel that passes through the middle of your left arch.
- Keep your front thigh muscles (quadriceps) actively firm by gently drawing your kneecaps up. Bring a slight bend into both knees to keep from hyperextending the joints. Inhale and raise your right arm overhead, stretching your side from your hip to your shoulder.
- Slightly shift your pelvis to the left. As you exhale, extend your trunk to the right and reach out with your right arm, bringing it parallel to the ground. Reach your fingers farther to the right, lengthening both sides of your trunk. Let the weight of your hips shift back naturally.
- Draw your shoulder blades slightly toward each other and imagine your clavicles (collarbones) moving slightly apart to open your chest. Work to keep your front right thigh rolling out (rotating externally). At the same time, press firmly into the left foot, while engaging the gluteal (buttocks) and hamstring muscles as if you were pressing your thigh backward. This action opens both hip joints to create a natural opening within the groin. Your pelvis will continue to rotate slightly toward the right, which protects the integrity of your sacrum.
- Inhale and create more length in your torso by imagining your pelvis and right rib cage moving away from each other as you stretch your torso further out over the right thigh. This elongates your right side and helps keep your spine in alignment.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- When you have reached as far to the right as you comfortably can, begin to lower your right hand toward the ground and reach your left fingertips toward the sky, keeping your hands aligned with your shoulders. Allow your pelvis to remain slightly turned inward to the right and externally rotate your left rib cage open toward the sky. Imagine your breath opening more space in your right rib cage as it extends out over your right leg.
- Feel the left side of your torso stretch so that your left shoulder and left hip move farther away from each other. Keep your rib cage as parallel to the ground as possible. Imagine that your upper body is suspended to the side with gentle support from your legs.
- Gaze forward, keeping your ears aligned with your shoulders; alternatively, turn and look down toward your right fingers. Keep your neck relaxed and in line with the rest of your spine.
- Focus on balancing yourself evenly in both feet as your chest and hips remain open.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To come out of the posture, inhale and continue to press down through your legs as you bring your upper body into an upright standing position. If there is any tension in your front leg, slightly bend the knee to create more ease as you exit the pose. Prepare for the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Arches—Encourage students to roll the inner (medial) ankles upward to lift the arches. You can brush your hand in the direction in which you instruct a student to move the ankle, or you can place your fingers between the ground and the student's arch to create more space beneath the arch.

Legs—Remind students to lightly draw up the front thigh muscles (quadriceps) to help keep the kneecaps lifted. You can gently brush the mid-thigh muscles toward the hips. If the knees are hyperextending, remind students to relax the knees slightly and engage the hamstrings by imagining that they are drawing the legs back together.

Torso—Stand behind the student, using your thigh as a brace. Place your hand on the student's upper rib cage and gently guide the upper ribs toward you without drawing the pelvis back.

Rib cage—Place the palm of your hand lightly on top of the student's upper rib cage, halfway between the shoulder and the hip. Instruct the student to lengthen the spine and move the rib cage away from your hand so that it does not curve toward the ceiling. Also, you may stand facing the student's outstretched arm and hold onto the forearm as you move it toward you. While doing this, place your toes against the bend in the student's hip crease and gently press the student's pelvis away from you.

Shoulders—Direct students to rotate both shoulders externally in order to keep the chest open and expanded, cueing them to softly draw the shoulder blades toward each other. If a student's torso is extending either in front of or behind the plane of the front hip, gently move the shoulders back into alignment. Be sure to hold students securely while you move them and to let go slowly, making certain that they maintain balance.

Hands—If the student's lower hand is placed against the shin or anywhere close to the knee joint, instruct the student to be conscientious by *not* pressing the body weight into the front of the leg; pressing back on the leg increases the risk of knee hyperextension. If the student continues to press on the top of the leg, modify the posture by placing a block or chair under the lower hand on the outside of the front leg wherever the student can comfortably reach it. Also encourage the student to use the abdominal and back muscles to help support the upper body.

Head and neck—Cue the student to lengthen the neck and extend the head away from the shoulders without strain or stiffness.



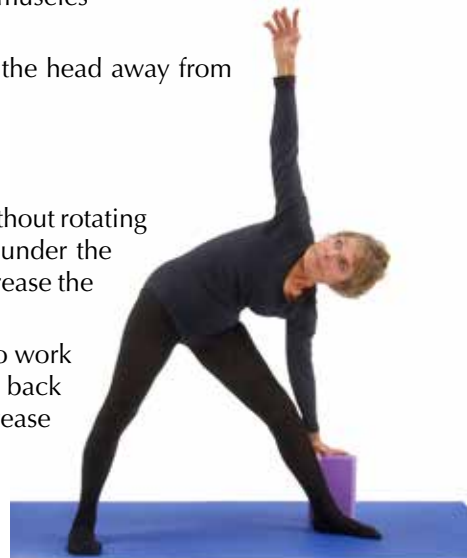
Adjustment: rib cage.

MODIFICATIONS

Extreme stiffness—If a student has trouble reaching for the ground without rotating the chest toward the ground, place a block or the seat of a chair under the bottom hand to elevate it slightly. The student may also need to decrease the distance between the legs.

Balance and alignment difficulty—Place the student against a wall to work on alignment. Cue the student to press the shoulder blades and the back of the lower hip into the wall. The student may also need to decrease the distance between the legs.

Neck weakness—Suggest that the student turn the gaze toward the ground, but remind him or her to maintain the line of the entire spine. This action continues to build strength but reduces the strain on the neck.



Modification: extreme stiffness.

KINEMATICS

Utthita Trikonasana engages both balance and strength. Getting into position requires eccentric contractions of the top lateral torso. Much of the movement in this asana occurs in the transverse plane, with the torso and top leg moving slightly backward in opposition to the natural forward rotation of the pelvis. Once the position has been established, most of the muscle activity shifts to isometric contractions to maintain body position with balance.

Many instructors have been taught that the torso and pelvis should be kept squared in the frontal plane by strongly pressing the top hip back. However, for most people, this alignment creates an unnatural torque in the sacrum, and it often overstretches the ligaments. This destabilizing force can create pain in the sacroiliac joint and the lower back. Cueing students to slightly vary the internal rotation of the back foot, based on individual comfort level, allows for a softer hip opening for those with tighter hips.

Utthita Trikonasana (Flexing to the Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Internal rotation of foot, stability	Anterior tibialis, posterior tibialis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Thigh (R)	Knee extension and patella elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	Adductors, medial hamstrings
	Hip stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (I)	
	External rotation of femur, stability	Deep external rotators* (C, I)	Gluteus medius, gluteus minimus
Thigh (L)	Stability	Adductor longus, adductor magnus (I)	Adductors
	External rotation of femur, stability	Deep external rotators* (I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata (I)	
	Hip stability	Gluteus medius, gluteus minimus (I)	
	Pelvic stability	Hamstrings (E, I)	
	External rotation of femur, stability	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	External rotation of femur, lateral flexion, stability	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas, gluteus medius, tensor fascia lata
	Hip extension, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, E, I)	
	Lateral flexion to right, stability	Tensor fascia lata (E, I)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
Torso (R and L)	Spinal stability	Erector spinae (C, I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability and rotation	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)	
Torso (L)	Lateral flexion to right, stability	Internal and external obliques, quadratus lumborum, latissimus dorsi, erector spinae (E, I)	Internal and external obliques, quadratus lumborum, latissimus dorsi, erector spinae

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Shoulder	Abduction of humerus and joint stability	Deltoids, supraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	Depression and stability of humerus	Subscapularis, infraspinatus (C, I), teres minor	
	Scapular rotation	Serratus anterior, mid and lower trapezius (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back and downward pull on scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus and teres minor with some posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Wrist and finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Stability	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Parivrtta Trikonasana

Revolving Triangle Pose

[par-ee-VRT-tuh tree-kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Parivrtta* means “the other side”; it is also often translated as meaning “to revolve” or “revolving.” *Trikonasana* means “triangle”—thus the name of this asana, in which the anterior (front) torso rotates along the axis of the spine in the opposite direction of *Utthita Trikonasana*.

DESCRIPTION

Parivrtta Trikonasana is similar to *Utthita Trikonasana* (Extended Triangle) but shifts the front of the pelvis from the frontal plane to a position in which it is almost parallel to the ground, thus causing the upper body to rotate around the spine. The twist through the mid-thoracic spine makes the posture more challenging for most students because it requires greater strength, flexibility, and balance than are needed for *Utthita Trikonasana*.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, and third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the heel and the first metatarsal head of the front foot. Anchor into the heel and the metatarsal heads of the back foot. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.

BENEFITS

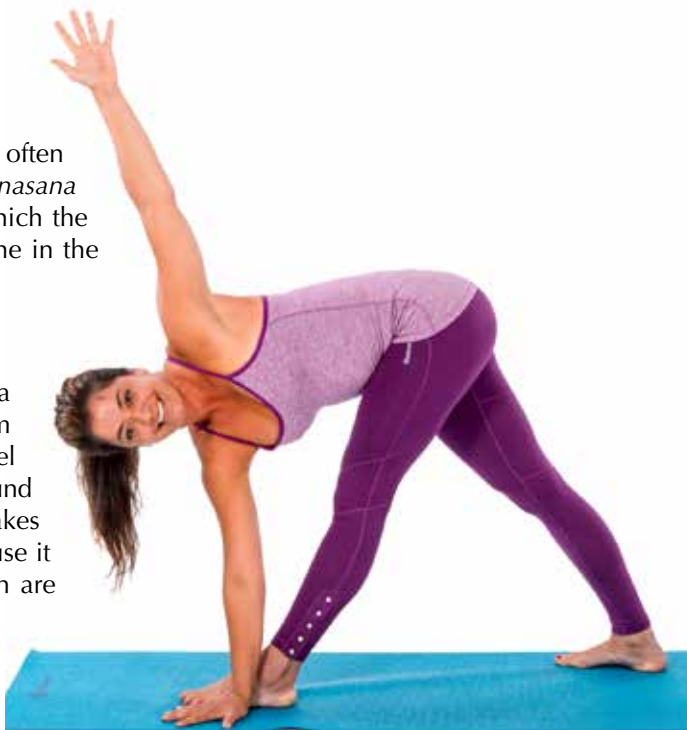
- Energizes the entire body.
- Massages the internal organs and stretches supporting spinal musculature.
- Enhances balance.
- Strengthens and stretches hips and legs.

⚠ CAUTION

Back injury—As with any twisting posture, students with an acute back injury should be cautious when practicing this asana—or skip it entirely.

VERBAL CUES

- Moving from *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose), step your left leg back far enough that the distance between your feet is challenging but comfortable while also allowing you to keep your left heel firmly on the ground. Face your right foot forward and externally rotate your left foot about 10 to 15 degrees.
- Place your hands on your hips and softly press your inner thighs toward each other to stabilize your pelvis and bring attention to your balance. This action also draws your left hip slightly forward and keeps your right leg and torso facing your right foot.

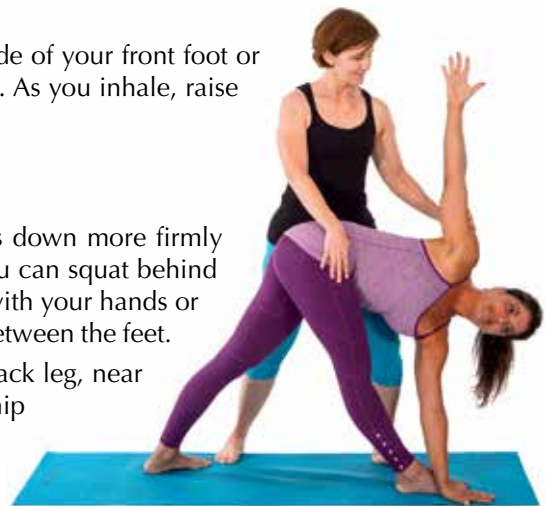


- Inhale, lengthen out of your low spine, and reach your left arm overhead while keeping your right hand on your hip.
- Exhale and fold forward from your hips like a hinge, keeping your right hip stable. Allow your right hand to slightly encourage your right hip back as you continue to reach forward with your left hand to elongate your torso.
- Stop folding forward at the first point of resistance, whether it be in your hamstrings, hips, or lower back. Picture your breath stabilizing your balance.
- When you are in a comfortable position, exhale and place your left hand as far down the outside of your right leg as possible without extending past your comfort range or the edge of your balance. Imagine pressing your right leg outward, without actually moving it, and press your left hand against your outer right leg to engage your outer hip muscles more fully for stability.
- When you feel stable, rotate your torso slightly to the right and imagine the outside of your right shoulder pointing toward the sky. Take a breath for stability and then straighten your right arm so that the palm points away from you and your fingers point to the sky.
- Inhale as you reopen the space between your hips and ribs by lengthening your lower ribs away from your pelvis. Continue to elongate your entire spine all the way through your neck. Align your chin with the center of your chest as much as possible without strain. If this taxes your balance, continue to look toward your right foot.
- Keep your left hand reaching down toward the ground as your right hand stretches upward. Allow your breaths to encourage more openness across your chest.
- Remember to continue grounding through your feet and feel the revolving action through your mid-spine and arms with each exhalation.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit the posture, unwind and bring your hands to either side of your front foot or leg. Take a breath, then slowly place your hands on your hips. As you inhale, raise yourself upright. Prepare for your next posture.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—If the back foot lifts off the ground, cue the student to press down more firmly on the outside of the back heel and the outer edge of the foot. You can squat behind the student and press lightly on the outer aspect of the back foot with your hands or toes. If the heel still lifts, ask the student to decrease the distance between the feet.

Spine—If a student is rounding the spine, stand to the side of the back leg, near the hips. Place your closest hand on the top of the student's far hip and your other hand on the far shoulder. Using your hip to support the student's balance, draw the student's hip and shoulder slightly farther apart and draw the top shoulder toward you. Use your hand to roll the shoulder down, away from the ear.



Adjustment: spine.

MODIFICATIONS

Balance difficulty—Have the student slightly bend the front knee. This action also allows for more leverage to open the hips and straighten the spine.

Tight hips or hamstrings—Place a block or a chair under the lower hand. The use of the prop helps establish and maintain a straight spine while eliminating undue strain on the hamstrings.

Balance or weakness—Have the student stand with the outside of the front leg against a wall. Instruct the student to lean into the wall for balance and to press the hand reaching down against the wall. A block may also be necessary for comfort.



Modification: tight hips or hamstrings.

KINEMATICS

One of the most important aspects of this posture is to keep the spine as elongated as possible while flexing from the hip joints. For this reason, students with tightness in the hamstrings or low back should use a block or other prop under the bottom hand to keep the upper back from rounding. Also, direct students to focus on having the twist come predominantly from the thoracic spine in order to help maintain integrity and stability in the hips, sacrum, and lumbar spine.

Parivrtta Trikonasana (Rotating to the Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Plantar flexion for foot and ankle stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus (C, I)	
	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle stability	Peroneals (E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Thigh (R and L)	Knee extension and patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	
	Hip stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus, adductors (I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Hamstrings (E, I)	Hamstrings, tensor fascia lata, gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators*
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension	Hamstrings (E, I)	Adductors
	Slight external rotation and stability	Deep external rotators* (I)	
Torso (R and L)	Trunk stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis (I)	Erector spinae
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Torso (R)	Rotation to right	Internal obliques, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	External obliques
Torso (L)	Rotation to right	External obliques (C, I)	Quadratus lumborum, latissimus dorsi, internal obliques
Shoulder	Humerus abduction and shoulder stability	Deltoids, infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor and mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back and downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus and teres minor with some posterior deltoid (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Upper arm	Elbow	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm (R)	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Lower arm (R and L)	Elbow	Anconeus (C, I)	
Lower arm (L)	Pronation	Pronator teres (C, I)	
	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis, longus, and brevis; extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Stability	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Uttanasana

Intense Forward Bend

[oot-taahn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Ut* means “intensity,” and *tan* means “to stretch or lengthen.”

DESCRIPTION

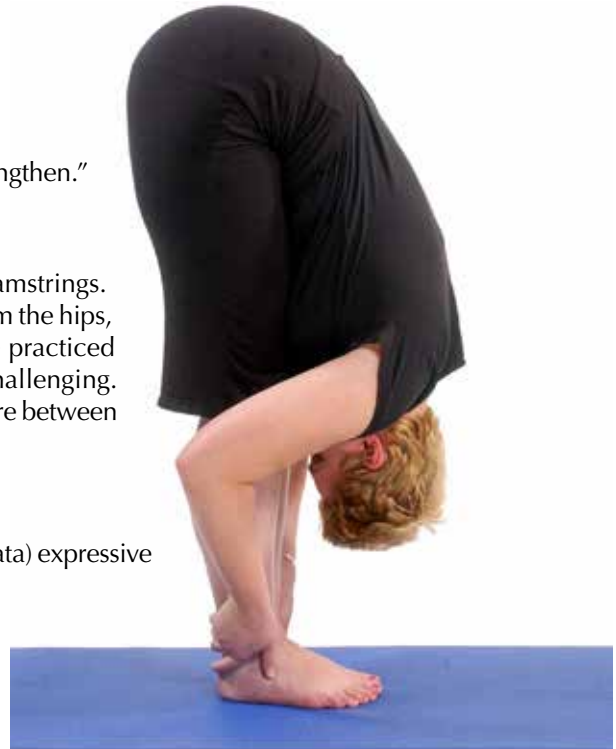
Uttanasana intensely stretches and lengthens the spine and hamstrings. This basic standing forward bend should be done by folding from the hips, like a hinge, while maintaining a straight low back. It can be practiced with the legs at any distance apart that feels comfortable yet challenging. Uttanasana is usually performed as a resting, rejuvenating posture between other standing postures and as part of the Sun Salutations.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, fourth chakra (Anahata) expressive energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the metatarsal heads. Anchor into the center of each heel.



BENEFITS

- Strengthens and stretches the spinal muscles.
- Lengthens and stretches the hamstrings and opens the posterior of the hips.
- Relaxes and rejuvenates the whole body.
- Stimulates the liver, spleen, and kidneys.
- Helps relieve headache.
- Stimulates the digestive system.

⚠️ CAUTIONS

Back concerns—Anyone with low back concerns should be extremely mindful to bend forward from the hips only as far as is comfortable and only with the use of props. In addition, instruct students to be mindful when exiting from Uttanasana to avoid straining the low back. By focusing on lifting from the crown of the head to maintain length in the spine, softening the knees slightly, and using their arms when necessary, students alleviate pain and avoid possible damage.

Late pregnancy—Practice with modifications (wider leg position and use of props) or skip this posture.

Glaucoma—As with all postures where the head is below the heart, this pose is not recommended without modification for students with glaucoma. If it is practiced, it should be held for a very short time.

VERBAL CUES

- Start in Tadasana (Mountain Pose) with your feet at a comfortable yet challenging distance apart. Firm your thigh muscles by pressing your legs slightly back without hyperextending your knees. Inhale and raise your arms above your head. If your lower ribs flare forward and your spine moves into extension, imagine pressing your back rib cage toward a wall behind you and draw your front pelvis slightly upward to reestablish an aligned posture.

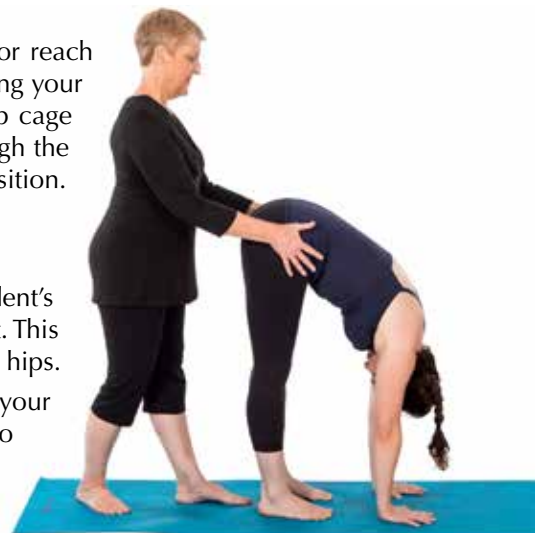
- Exhale and draw your kneecaps upward slightly as you begin to fold forward at your hip joints. Keep the length of your spine intact. Fold as far forward as feels comfortable to your back and hamstrings, stopping to breathe at the first point of resistance. Let your arms come into a restful position on a prop or on the ground and relax your shoulders.
- Continue to reach out of the low back to keep length in your entire spine. Relax and picture your vertebrae sinking toward the ground. If you feel any discomfort in your low back, place your hands on a prop to decrease the flexion.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Relax your neck so that the crown of your head sinks toward the ground.
- If your hands can touch the ground comfortably, place them near your heels and move your body weight slightly more forward so that your hips align directly over your ankle joints. This action challenges your balance slightly.
- If your hands do not touch the ground, allow them to hang down or place them against your legs or on a prop. Be sure that there is no strain in your low back, hips, or hamstrings.
- Picture your tailbone and sit bones reaching up to the sky as the crown of your head extends toward the ground. Press through your heels as you breathe in and let the bottom of your pelvis reach up farther. As you exhale, allow your spine to relax even deeper, suspending your upper body forward.
- Soften your belly. Breathe into your low back and visualize your ribs expanding to the sides, thus allowing more space for your breath. Keep your shoulders relaxed and away from your ears.
- To come out of the posture, place your hands on your hips or reach your arms out to the sides. Open your chest by gently squeezing your shoulder blades toward each other. Keep the front of your rib cage elevated, and as you inhale press through your legs. Lift through the crown of your head and begin to raise yourself to a standing position.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—As much as possible, be sure that the outer edges of the student's feet are parallel with each other and with the outer edges of the mat. This adjustment allows for more stability and alignment in the knees and hips.

Lower body—Standing behind or to the side of the student, place your hands lightly on the outside of the hips and gently move the hips so that they are aligned over the ankle joints with the legs perpendicular to the ground.

Neck—Gently touch the back of the student's head, or just remind the student verbally to relax the neck.



Adjustment: lower body.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hamstrings—Instruct the student to use a prop under the hands for support and to keep the spine elongated.

Rounded back—Instruct the student to take a wider stance with the feet or to use a prop.

Pregnancy or stiff back, hips, or hamstrings—Suggest that the student use a wall or chair for support to relieve some of the physical work involved in the posture, thus promoting an easier release in the spine and hamstrings. Instruct students to practice Ardha Uttanasana (Half Forward Fold) by placing the hands against a wall or on top of a chair seat and folding forward only until the spine is parallel to the ground.

Weakness or balance difficulty—The student can be seated on a chair (or exercise ball) with the feet placed comfortably apart. From there, instruct the student to fold as far forward as is comfortable.



Modification: weakness and balance difficulties.

KINEMATICS

The most common mistake that students make in practicing this posture is to bend forward from the lumbar or thoracic spine instead of from the hip joints. If the knees bend, the hips usually move out of alignment. Although bending the knees can take pressure out of the lower back, it does not allow the hamstrings the opportunity to stretch fully, and students generally continue to initiate the forward fold from the back rather than from the hips. To protect the lower back in people with particularly tight hamstrings, use a prop under the hands.

Uttanasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Gastrocnemius, anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, and flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	Gastrocnemius
	Slight external rotation of lower leg	Peroneus longus, brevis, and tertius (C, I)	
Thigh	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion, stability	Hamstrings (E, I), iliopsoas (C, I)	Gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators*
	Hip stability	Adductors (I)	
Torso	Spine extension	Thoracic erector spinae (C, I)	Lumbar erector spinae, quadratus lumborum
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder	Scapular abduction	(Gravity induced)	Latissimus dorsi, rhomboids, trapezius
	Humeral flexion	(Gravity induced)	Deltoids
Upper arm	Elbow extension	(Gravity induced)	Triceps brachii, biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Wrist extension or hyperextension	(Gravity or ground induced)	Extensor carpi radialis, brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	(Gravity or ground induced)	
Neck	Extension	None	Sternocleidomastoid, splenius capitus and cervicis, cervical erector spinae

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

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

Prasarita Padottanasana



Extended-Leg Forward Bend

[pruh-SAAH-ree-tuh paah-doht-taahn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Prasarita* means “to expand or spread.” This asana is a variation of a forward bend with the legs abducted.

DESCRIPTION

Although Prasarita Padottanasana has a number of variations, four are traditionally practiced in the warm-up of the Ashtanga yoga series. All four are pictured

here; however, the cueing is described only once because each variation begins in the same opening stance, followed by a gentle back arch and forward fold from the hips. The only difference is in arm and hand placement. After each forward bend, bring the hands back to the hips, stand, and move into the next posture.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, seventh chakra (Sahasrara), especially if the head touches the ground

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the metatarsal heads slightly more than the heels. Anchor into the outer edges of the feet.

BENEFITS

- Stretches the hamstrings, inner thighs, and low back.
- Builds stability in the feet and legs.
- Stretches the shoulder joints throughout the range of motion.
- Relaxes and recharges the mind and body.
- Stimulates and tones the abdominals.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Shoulder injury—Students with shoulder concerns should proceed cautiously in variation 3.

Back concerns—Anyone with low-back concerns should be extremely mindful and bend at the hips only as far as is comfortable. A block or wall should be used for additional support.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), step your legs out as wide as is comfortable. Internally rotate your feet slightly and press through the edges of the feet.
- Position your body so that your hips, belly, and chest point forward. Anchor into the outer edges of your feet, drawing energy up from your arches into your pelvis.
- Bring your hands to your hips and open your chest by drawing your shoulder blades gently toward each other and softening them down toward your hips. As you continue to press your feet firmly against the ground, feel your spine lengthen.

- Inhale and lift your chest slightly, feeling more expansion in your chest. Imagine the breath drawing your collarbones wider.
- Exhale, drawing your lower abdomen inward as you begin to fold forward from your hip joints. Slightly lift your knee-caps as you continue flexing forward.
- As you continue to exhale, press through your legs and fold further forward, maintaining the length and openness in your upper back and chest.
- Lower your hands to the ground or to a prop and place them shoulder-width apart between your feet.
- Inhale as you straighten your arms and look forward while arching (hyperextending) your back slightly. Feel the front of your chest broaden and the front of your torso open.
- Exhale and bend your elbows as you lower the crown of your head toward the ground into a deeper fold. Keep your inner elbows pulled in toward each other and relax your neck so that your ears drop away from your shoulders.
- Adjust your body weight so that your hip joints align directly over your ankles. Roll forward slightly toward your toes, while still keeping your heels on the ground; this straightens your knees slightly, giving you a deeper stretch in the hamstrings. By moving slowly, you will maintain balance.
- If your head touches the ground, put as much weight on the crown of your head as feels comfortable to you, being mindful not to compress your neck. If you have so much flexibility in the hips that when you fold forward your neck crimps, bring your legs slightly closer together.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit, place your hands on your hips and press firmly through your feet. Keep your elbows pointing away from you behind your back. Inhale as you lift yourself upright. Step or jump your feet together into Tadasana.



Variation 2: Hands remain on the hips and elbows are drawn toward each other behind the back.



Variation 3: Hands clasp behind the back. If there is sufficient flexibility and comfort, the hands can lower toward the ground behind the head.



Variation 4: Hands reach out and grasp the big toes.

ADJUSTMENTS

Balance—If the student has weak balance, stand behind her or him. Place the side of your hip against the back of the student's thigh to block him or her from placing the weight too far back on the heels. You can also stand to the front of the student, placing your hands lightly on the outer edges of the hips, and slowly and gently bring the body weight forward onto the toes to provide better alignment.

Hands—When the student's hands are on the ground, they should be in line with the feet. If the hands are too far forward in front of the line of the toes, instruct the student to move the hands back. Have the student accommodate moving the hands back by spreading the feet wider apart if comfortable.

Neck—If a student has hyperextended the neck, gently touch the back of the head to cue relaxation.

Elbows—In variation 2, if the student's elbows are not parallel to each other, stand behind the student and place your hands on the upper arms and roll the elbows inward toward the midline of the body. This adjustment also helps increase chest expansion. To further stabilize and build strength in the chest and shoulders in variation 1, place a block between the student's elbows and instruct the student to squeeze into it while keeping length in the spine.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hamstrings or back—For the very inflexible, place the student's palms against a wall or on the seat of a chair to help avoid back strain while slowly stretching the hamstrings. For those with more flexibility, place the palms on a yoga block to provide support. Remind the student to focus on the length and expansion of the spine while relaxing the back of the legs.

Tight groin—If the student is unable to abduct the legs far enough to place the head on the ground, place a block or chair seat under the head for support. Make certain that the prop is on a secure surface so that it will not slip.

Weakness—Place the student at the edge of a chair or on a fitness ball. Instruct the student to bend forward from the hips and practice the variations of the arm positions.



Modification: tight hamstrings or back.

KINEMATICS

As in Uttanasana, if the quadriceps contract concentrically, the hamstrings relax more readily. Like Uttanasana, which focuses deeply on the hamstrings, Prasarita Padottanasana also stretches both the hip adductor group (inner thigh) and the peroneal group (outer calf) at the lateral ankle joint. Note: Although four variations of the asana are discussed, only variation 1 is described in the kinematic table.

Prasarita Padottanasana (Variation 1)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
Lower leg	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Gastrocnemius, anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Thigh	Leg extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings, adductors
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Hamstrings (E, I)	Deep external rotators*
	Thigh abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata (C, I)	
Torso	Spine extension	Thoracic erector spinae (C, I)	Lumbar erector spinae
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder	Scapular abduction	(Gravity induced)	Latissimus dorsi, rhomboids, mid trapezius
	Overhead extension	(Gravity induced)	
Upper arm	Humeral flexion	(Gravity induced)	Deltoids, triceps brachii, biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Elbow flexion	(Gravity induced)	
	Wrist extension or hyperextension	(Gravity or ground induced)	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (I)	
Neck	Extension	None	Sternocleidomastoid, splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae

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

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



Garudasana

Eagle Pose

[guh-rood-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Garuda* refers to the king of birds: the eagle. It also suggests the focus needed to remain steady in this position.

DESCRIPTION

This one-legged balancing posture involves crossing the non-weight-bearing leg over the standing leg. The thighs and hips are activated by the slight crouch. The mid back and posterior shoulders are stretched as the arms cross in front of the chest. As with an eagle focused and ready for action, this pose helps one develop stillness and concentration.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

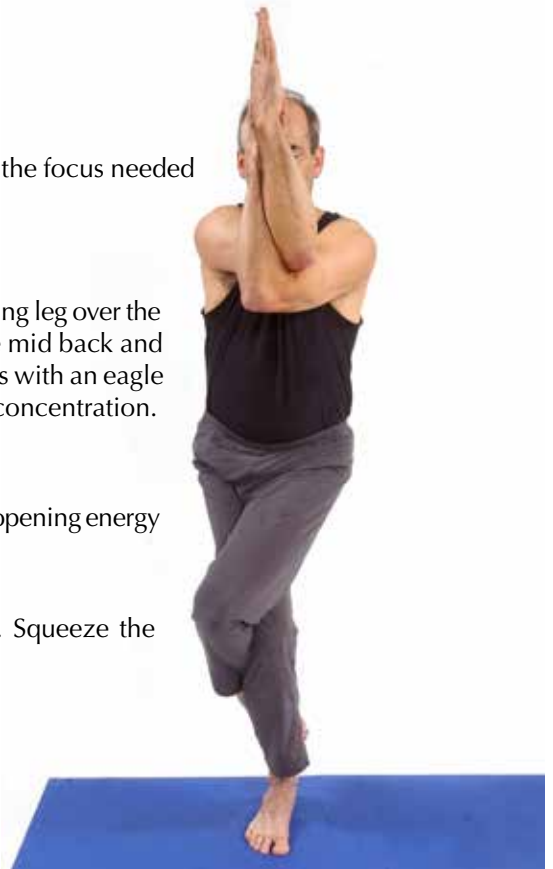
First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the metatarsal heads and the heel of the standing foot. Squeeze the energy of the inner thighs together.

BENEFITS

- Helps develop focus, concentration, and increased balance.
- Provides a deep stretch in the outer hips, along the posterior shoulders, and between the shoulder blades.
- Stretches and strengthens the calf and ankle of the standing leg.



⚠️ CAUTIONS

Hip replacement—For students with hip replacement, crossing the affected limb beyond the midline of the body (adducting) is generally contraindicated (see the modifications section).

Knee injury—Students with knee concerns should use modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), find a gazing point (*drishti*) somewhere in front of you for focus. Keep your gaze fixed on this spot throughout the posture to help eliminate visual distraction.
- Shift your weight slightly to your right leg. Root through the toes and heel of your right foot. Inhale to create space in your spine and keep your pelvis square and aligned under the shoulders.
- Bring your hands to your hips and roll your front shoulders open as you exhale and slightly bend both knees. Be sure that your body weight falls straight down from your spine and that your knees do not extend beyond your feet. Flex your hips as if you were going to sit on a tall chair.
- Slowly lift your left heel off the ground. Breathe, and when you feel stable, lift your toes off the ground and cross your left knee over your right leg above the right knee joint, keeping both knees bent. If possible, hook the top of your left foot behind your right calf and slightly press your inner thigh muscles (adductors) toward each other for stability.
- Keep the line of your sit bones directed toward the ground and your rib cage and chest lifted and open. With every breath in, reach the crown of your head upward.
- Continue to focus on your breath.

- Maintain length in your entire spine from your low back to your neck. Keep your body weight balanced with your hips pressing back slightly and your spine as perpendicular to the ground as possible.
- Inhale and stretch your arms apart out to your sides, like wings. Exhale and cross your arms above the elbows in front of your chest as if you were giving yourself a hug with your right arm over your left arm. Feel the shoulder blades draw slightly apart.
- On an exhalation, externally rotate your upper arms so that the backs of your hands come closer together in front of your face. If you comfortably can, press your palms together, essentially wrapping (binding) your arms. Bring your hands in line with your gaze, along the midline of your body.
- Continue to focus on your breath—the smoother and steadier your breath, the steadier your balance. Imagine drawing energy up from the ground and having it centered in your navel, where your center of mass sits.
- Breathe into the space between your shoulder blades, feeling them move slightly away from each other with each inhalation, gently stretching the trapezius muscles. Be sure to soften your shoulders away from your ears, keeping your neck as long as possible.
- To exit the posture, inhale and slowly unwind your arms. Uncross your left leg and place the foot on the ground. Inhale and straighten your right leg. Prepare for the opposite side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Balance—First, for better balance, instruct the student to spread the toes as wide as is comfortable. Stand behind the student and place your hands lightly on either side of the hips. While the student exhales, draw the hips slightly back and down. At the same time, use the outside of one of your shoulders to press against the student's mid back in order to encourage the student to lift the rib cage and open the space between the shoulder blades.

Knee of standing leg—If the knee of a student's standing leg extends too far forward in front of the line of the toes, stand behind and slightly to the side of the student with your hip close to the student's sacrum. Allow your hip to support some of the student's body weight. Holding onto the hips, gently move the student's body weight back over the heels.

Shoulders—Lightly touch the tops of the student's shoulders to encourage the student to relax the shoulders away from the ears.

Elbows—If the student's arms are crossed below the elbow, on the forearm, stand to the front of the student and grasp the upper arms and gently move each arm across the student's chest, toward the opposite shoulder. Do not attempt this adjustment if the student has any shoulder injury or discomfort.



Adjustment: balance.

MODIFICATIONS

Balance difficulty—Place the student with the back against a wall if one is available; if not, instruct the student to keep the toes of the lifted foot lightly touching the ground or resting on a block.

Knee concerns—Encourage the student to keep the toes of the non-weight-bearing leg on the ground to help maintain balance. This placement also keeps the supporting leg from taking all of the body weight. Students with knee concerns should avoid hooking the top of the raised foot behind the standing calf. Another option, which can also help those with balance difficulty, is to sit at the edge of a chair or fitness ball (or lean against a wall) in order to keep the hips aligned (and use the wall as a sort of training wheel as needed).

Hip replacement or extremely tight hip—Instruct the student to cross the legs at the ankle joint and to avoid crossing the non-weight-bearing knee over the midline of the body.

Tight shoulders or large chest—If the student is unable to bring the elbows near each other in front of the body, one option is to invite the student to focus on pressing the forearms together and breathing fully into the space between the shoulder blades. The student may also simply reach the top hand across to the opposite shoulder while placing the bottom hand or forearm against the outside of the reaching arm, thus encouraging a stretch in the outside of the top arm as it crosses the chest.



Adjustment: tight shoulders or large chest.

KINEMATICS

To avoid placing undue stress on the weight-bearing leg, the knee joint should be aligned with or posterior to the forefoot. Students whose upper body is heavy or tight will have difficulty wrapping the arms. In this case, instruct them to give themselves a “hug” by reaching the hands toward the opposite shoulders. This action allows for a stretch in the posterior shoulder musculature.

Garudasana (Standing on Right Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe hyperextension	Extensor digitorum longus, extensor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (E, I)	
	Ankle stability	Anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus, peroneals (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
	Ankle eversion	Peroneals, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Quadriceps (E, I)	
	Knee stability	Adductors (I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	
	Hip stability	Gluteus medius and minimus, adductors (I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	Gluteus medius and minimus; deep external rotators*
	Thigh adduction	Adductors, gracilis, pectineus (C, I)	
Torso	Trunk stability	Rectus abdominis, internal and external obliques, transverse abdominis, erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Postural support and downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
Shoulder	Horizontal flexion of humerus	Pectoralis major, anterior deltoid, coracobrachialis (C, I)	Rhomboids, upper and mid trapezius, posterior deltoid
	Stability and external rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor (I)	
	Scapular depression	Pectoralis minor, subclavius (C, I)	
	Scapular stability	Serratus anterior (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	Triceps brachii
Lower arm	Pronation of lower arm	Pronator teres, pronator quadratus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	
	Wrist stability	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus (I)	
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, extensor digiti minimi brevis (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Flexor and extensor pollicis longus, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis (I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Utthita Parshvakonasana

Extended Side-Angle Stretch

[oot-T-HEE-tuh paarsh-vuh-kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Parshva* means “side” or “flank,” *kon* means “angle,” and *utthita* means “extended.” Thus Utthita Parshvakonasana is an extended side-angle (or flank-angle) stretch.

DESCRIPTION

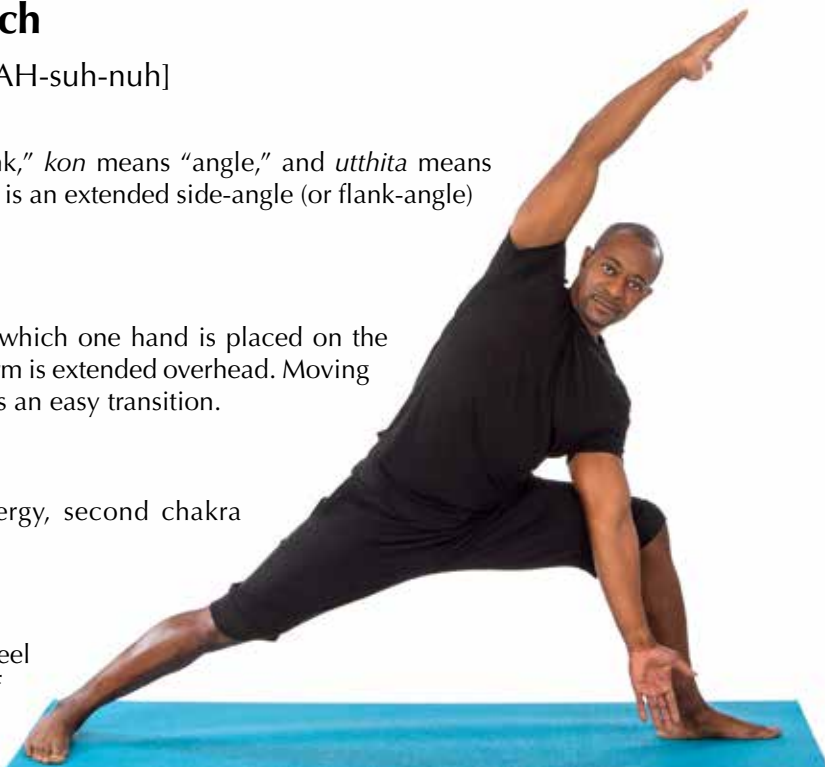
This posture is a side-stretching lunge in which one hand is placed on the ground on the lunging side and the other arm is extended overhead. Moving into it from Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II) is an easy transition.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the metatarsal heads and the heel of both feet. Anchor into the outer foot of the back leg.



BENEFITS

- Stretches the side of the body.
- Helps relieve sciatica.
- Helps relieve hip, thigh, and low back pain caused by arthritis or imbalance.
- Opens the groin.
- Stabilizes the hip and knee joints.
- Opens and stabilizes the chest and shoulders.
- Increases circulation to structures around the heart and lungs.
- Tones the abdominal muscles.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee concerns—Students with a knee injury should be extra careful to prevent the bent knee from either rolling inward or extending beyond the line of the toes.

Neck pain or injury—Students with a neck concern should look forward and focus on keeping the sides of the neck long.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), extend your arms out to your sides with your palms facing down.
- Step your feet apart, abducting your legs, so that your feet are as far apart as your outstretched hands, or as far apart as is comfortably challenging.
- Externally rotate your left leg out 90 degrees, then turn your right foot in slightly toward your left at about 45 degrees.

- Exhale and slowly bend your left knee so that the top of your left thigh is as parallel to the ground as possible while making sure not to extend the knee beyond the toes. If this misalignment happens, move into a slightly wider stance.
- Inhale and open and expand from the front center of your spine. Feel your hips and shoulders opening and your spine extending and lengthening.
- Exhale, keeping the foundation of your body strong, and reach through your left arm as your left rib cage extends out over your left thigh. Continue to root through the outside edge of your right foot. Bend your left elbow and place the forearm on top of your left thigh. Breathe here and allow your pelvis to naturally turn slightly toward your left leg while your right thigh remains active and anchoring.
- If it feels comfortable to do so, on an exhalation, lower your left hand to the ground, to either the inside or the outside of your left foot. By placing your left arm in front of the knee, you make it easier to press back with your upper arm to keep your knee from rolling inward. Placing your hand behind your left foot makes it easier to maintain a frontal plane orientation in your rib cage. Place your hand where you feel that it most supports your body.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Take your right hand to your right rib cage and press back (externally rotating) if you feel your chest rolling toward your left thigh. Inhale and reestablish the length in your side, expanding through the front and back of your spine.
- On the next inhalation, sweep your right arm out in front of your body with your right palm facing the ground. Keep your shoulders relaxed away from your ears and extend your right arm over your head so that your biceps (upper arm) is close to your right ear. Imagine a strong line of energy drawing upward from the outside of your right foot all the way into your right fingertips.
- Keep the space in your neck as long and extended as possible. Press your right thumb slightly back to open your shoulder a bit more. Continue to root through your right foot while still pressing the outside of your left knee laterally to open your groin. Visualize your thighs rolling away from each other, opening your hip joints more with each breath.
- Remain focused on your breathing.
- To exit the position, press firmly through both feet and inhale while extending your left knee and sweeping your right arm out to the right side of your body. Imagine that you are being pulled up by that right hand. Prepare for the next side.

ADJUSTMENTS

- **Bent knee**—If the student is physically able to do so, remind him or her to maintain the bent knee at an angle where the thigh is close to being parallel with the ground. If necessary, instruct the student to adjust the distance between the feet in order to modify the angle of the knee. If the knee rotates inward, semi-squat behind the student and place your closest hand on the mid-thigh of the bent knee and your opposite hand on the upper hip for stability. Gently guide the bent knee into alignment.
- **Hips and torso**—Instruct the student to imagine rolling the front of the straight leg externally to encourage more opening in the hip joint without compromising the pelvis. Stand behind the student and brace your knee against the back of the pelvis. Use your closest hand to stabilize the top hip so that the student maintains balance. Use your other hand to support the student's upper body and maintain an open chest.
- **Hand placement**—Help the student decide whether to place the lower arm in front of or behind the foot, depending on the student's stability, flexibility, and openness in the hips. If the student is new to the pose or has overly tight hips, encourage the use of a block.



Adjustment: hips and torso.

MODIFICATIONS

Stiff hips—If the student cannot comfortably reach the ground without compromising the spinal alignment, instruct the student to bend the elbow of the downward facing arm and place the forearm on the bent thigh as close to the knee as possible. The student may also use a block for leverage. Caution: Students often sink into the shoulder in this modification. It can be difficult for them to achieve length in the side to lift out of the low back and neck, so cue them to press the forearm down into the thigh, or hand into the block, and lengthen the torso.

Balance concerns—A student with balance concerns can be placed with her or his back against a wall to help maintain balance. It is also helpful to use a block or chair to support the lower arm.

Stiff neck or shoulders—If the neck fatigues or is extremely stiff, instruct the student to look down toward the foot of the bent leg instead of forward.



Modification: stiff hips.

KINEMATICS

Students new to the posture often practice it in the modified position, wherein the lower arm rests on the thigh of the bent leg. Over time, as students increase strength and flexibility in the hips and shoulders, they develop the ability to bring the hand closer to the ground. Generally, when you see a student's lower shoulder pressed up near the ear, you can suggest that the student try to bring the hand to the ground or to a prop.

Utthita Parshvakonasana (Flexing to the Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle inversion, stability	Anterior tibialis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
	Ankle stability	Peroneals (E, I)	
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion, stability	Quadriceps (E, I)	
	Knee stability	Hamstrings, popliteus (I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
	External rotation of femur	Deep external rotators* (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	Adductors
	Hip flexion, abduction, and stability	Tensor fascia lata (E, I)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis (C, I)	
	External rotation of femur, stability	Deep external rotators* (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension and stability	Gluteus maximus, hamstrings (C, I)	Iliopsoas, adductors
	Abduction	Tensor fascia lata	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis (C, I)	
Torso	Torso stability	Erector spinae, rectus abdominis, internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder (R and L)	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Shoulder (R)	Humerus abduction and shoulder stability	Deltoids, infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Humerus flexion	Anterior deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Elbow	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R)	Wrist hyperextension, stability, finger extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus; extensor carpi ulnaris; extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, digitorum superficialis, palmaris longus
	Finger abduction, stability	Abductor pollicis longus, extensor pollicis brevis, interossei dorsales manus, abductor digiti minimi, abductor pollicis brevis, opponens pollicis (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (L)	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae, scalenes, sternocleidomastoid (I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Ardha Chandrasana

Half-Moon Pose

[AR-dhuh chuhn-DRAAH-suh-nuh]

Ardha is Sanskrit for “half,” and *chandra* is one of the Sanskrit words for “moon.”

DESCRIPTION

This posture is named more for the pattern that the body follows when entering the posture than for what it looks like in the posture itself. From Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle), the body weight is balanced on the forward leg as the trailing leg lifts off the ground in an arcing motion. If you visualize the moon as a big circle, then the arc that the non-weight-bearing leg moves through resembles the curve of the half-moon. As an extension of Utthita Trikonasana, Ardha Chandrasana provides similar benefits, most notably in that it opens the chest, hips, and pelvis.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy, and fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Balance evenly between the metatarsal heads and the heel of the standing leg. Root through the big toe with the little toe acting as a counterbalance. Use the hand on the ground as a balance support.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens the musculature of the weight-bearing leg, as well as the hip and torso on the non-weight-bearing side.
- Opens the chest and shoulders.
- Builds concentration and focus.
- Strengthens the hip abductors.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Pregnancy—After the first trimester, this pose should be practiced with modifications.

Weakness or balance concerns—Those with extreme weakness or balance difficulty should use modifications.

Hip or knee replacement—Those with a replacement joint should either refrain from doing this pose or practice it with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- Begin in Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle), with a 4 to 6 inch (10 to 15 centimeter) narrower stance.
- While extending your upper body over your right leg, bend your right knee and place your right hand down to the ground in front of your toes. Turn your head to look at your right foot and mindfully keep your right knee aligned with your right foot. Slightly press the knee externally to keep it from rolling inward, which can compromise the joint.
- Breathe deeply in this position for a few breaths and focus on the balance and strength in your right leg. Keep the space open in your hips, low back, and chest.
- Rest your left hand on your left hip. Check that your right leg continues to rotate externally and not inward—leg alignment in this pose is very important. Imagine your breath lifting the arch of your right foot.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- While keeping your right knee bent, extend your fingertips 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) further in front of your right toes. Inhale and slowly straighten your right leg as you lift your left leg until it is parallel to the ground. Press through the heel of your left foot, extending your toes to keep your leg strong. Focus on aligning your hips over your right ankle and your balance in your right foot.
- Consciously maintain external rotation in your right leg, keeping your knee and toes in alignment. Rotate your left hip back slightly; imagine that you are pressing your shoulder blades and hips against a wall behind you. With each inhalation, expand the space from the front center of the spine. Remember: The steadier your breath is, the steadier your balance will be.
- Turn to look forward, aligning your chin with your sternum, and keep length and space in your neck, shoulders, and chest. Raise your left hand in the air and keep both arms reaching out from the center of your spine. Feel the front of your shoulders externally rotate away from your chest. Use the energy in your right arm to help maintain upper body balance and alignment without relying completely on the arm for overall balance.
- Continue to focus on keeping the action and energy moving outward through your legs.
- To exit this posture, slowly bend your right knee and lower your left leg back to the ground. Inhale as you extend your right knee and bring yourself back into standing. Prepare to repeat on the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Standing leg—Make sure that the knee of the standing leg is aligned over the ankle and rotated externally by 90 degrees. For a stable foundation, it is usually best to have the student come out of the posture and move back into it with any necessary modifications.

Hip—Stand behind the student, facing toward the head, and position your closest hip against the student's top leg, hip, or low back for stability. Place your nearest hand on the student's top thigh and gently draw the pelvis toward you. Place your other hand on the student's nearest shoulder to help her or him maintain spinal alignment.

Extended leg—Standing behind the student, brace your nearest hip against the student's low back and place one hand lightly under the knee joint to move the leg parallel to the ground.



Adjustment: hip.

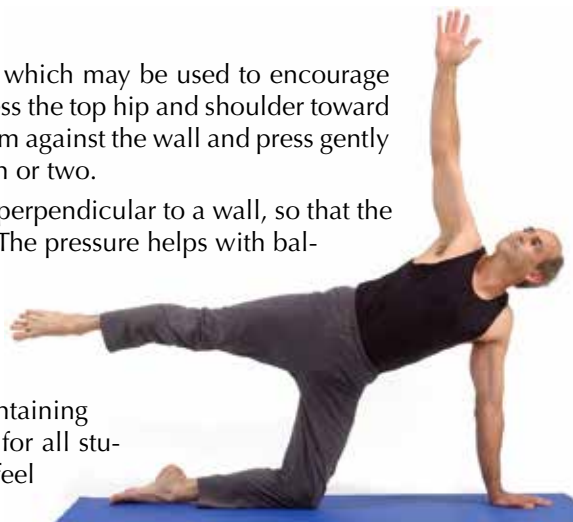
MODIFICATIONS

Balance training—Place the student with the back near a wall, which may be used to encourage alignment as well as balance support. Instruct the student to press the top hip and shoulder toward the wall. Also direct the student to place the fingers of the top arm against the wall and press gently into the hand to move the body away from the wall for a breath or two.

Weakness in hip abductors—Position the student with the body perpendicular to a wall, so that the sole of the non-weight-bearing foot is placed against the wall. The pressure helps with balance and with strengthening the lifted leg. If no wall is available, stand facing the sole of the foot and instruct the student to press the foot into your hand.

Difficulty reaching support hand to the ground—Place a block under the student's lower hand to aid in balancing and in maintaining proper alignment. This modification should generally be used for all students who are new to practicing this pose to help them get a feel for balance and keep them from overstretching.

Pregnancy or extreme weakness or imbalance—Instruct the student to kneel and place one hand on the ground or on a block at her or his side and lift the opposite leg off the ground.



Modification: pregnancy or extreme weakness or imbalance.

KINEMATICS

Because this version of Ardha Chandrasana is entered from Utthita Trikonasana—first flexing, then extending the knee of the balancing leg—it greatly uses the quadriceps and gluteals. In addition, the pull of gravity challenges the strength in the neck, hips, and spine as the student focuses on maintaining balance and alignment with the spine and non-weight-bearing leg parallel to the ground.

Ardha Chandrasana (Standing on Right Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus, anterior tibialis, extensor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus, peroneus tertius (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion and extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, E, I)	Adductors, gracilis
	External rotation of femur, stability	Gluteus maximus, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	
	Hip stability	Gluteus medius and minimus, adductors (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	
	Hip stability (against gravity)	Tensor fascia lata, gluteus medius and maximus, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
Torso	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder	Humerus abduction, shoulder stability	Deltoids, supraspinatus, (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	Humerus depression, stability	Subscapularis, infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back, downward pull on scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus and teres minor with some posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, digitorum superficialis, palmaris longus
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae, sternocleidomastoid (I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Parivrtta Parshvakonasana

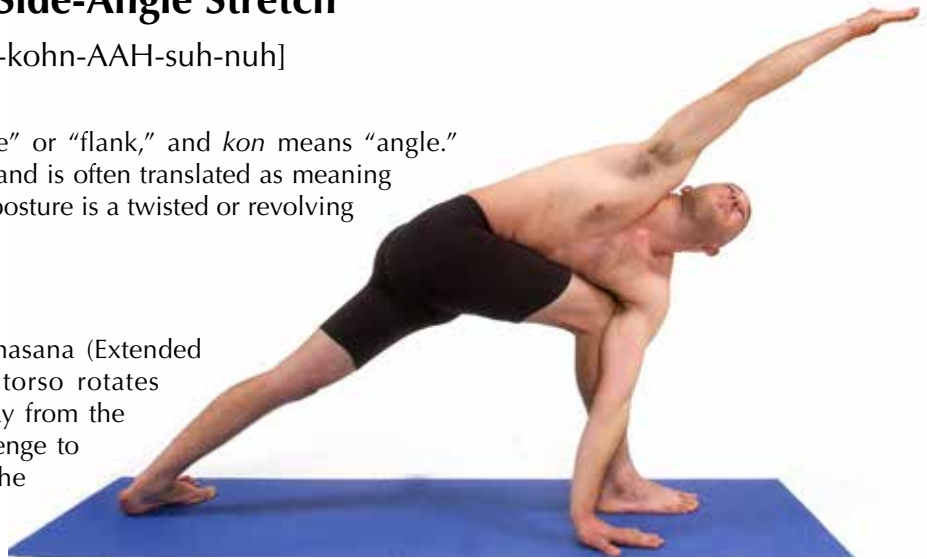
Revolving Extended Side-Angle Stretch

[par-ee-VRT-tuh paarsh-vuh-kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Parshva* means “side” or “flank,” and *kon* means “angle.” *Parivrtta* means “the other side” and is often translated as meaning “to revolve” or “revolving.” This posture is a twisted or revolving flank stretch.

DESCRIPTION

Starting from Utthita Parshvakonasana (Extended Side-Angle Stretch), the front torso rotates toward the flexed thigh and away from the anchoring back leg. It is a challenge to keep the back foot rooted on the ground, so the lower extremities must provide anchoring that connects the energy of the body with the ground while



maintaining balance. The two popular variations of this posture usually involve changing the arm position. In one, the top arm extends over the ears, as in Utthita Parshvakonasana. In the other, the hands are clasped together to create a bind (see Modifications).

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the metatarsal heads and the heel of the front foot. Anchor into the outer edge of the back foot. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.

BENEFITS

- Combines the benefits of Utthita Parshvakonasana with a spinal twist.
- Improves digestion.
- Stimulates circulation.
- Builds balance and focus.
- Provides deep stretch in the hips and shoulders and in the upward-facing side of the body.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Back concerns—As with other twists, a student with a back injury should be extra cautious and use modifications.

Neck concerns—A student with a neck concern should look straight ahead and focus on keeping length in the sides of the neck.

Pregnancy—It is not advisable to practice this posture during pregnancy due to the extreme rotation in the torso.

VERBAL CUES

- Start from Utthita Parshvakonasana (Extended Side-Angle Stretch) with your right leg forward and your right hand to the outside of your right foot. Bring your left hand from over your head to your left hip. You may need to adjust your left leg by turning your front pelvis toward the ground and lifting your heel off the ground so that you can square your hips and rotate your spine more comfortably.
- Once you feel balanced, press through the outside of your left heel, even if the heel does not reach the ground. If the heel remains lifted, gently draw the energy of your inner thighs toward each other without actually moving your thighs to help stabilize your balance.
- Rotate the center of your chest toward your right knee as you exhale. Reach your left elbow toward the outside of your right leg. If the spinal rotation feels comfortable for you, place your left hand on the ground to the outside of the right leg. If that degree of rotation is uncomfortable or overly challenging, place your left elbow on top of, or slightly to the outside of the right thigh.
- On each inhalation, lengthen your spine and open your chest. On each exhalation, slowly rotate slightly further toward the right, stopping at the first point of resistance. Stay mindful not to go past the edge of what is comfortably challenging. The rotation should be felt in your mid-thoracic spine.
- Extend your right arm and lift your right hand over your head, bringing your upper arm near your right ear. Gently guide your right thumb back to allow for more rotation in your right rib cage and openness in your chest, if doing so is comfortable. Keep your gaze forward or look down toward your right foot, keeping both sides of your neck long.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this position, exhale and slowly lower your right hand back to the ground as you release the rotation in your torso. Inhale and lift your left hand off the ground, and imagine being pulled up out of the lunge with that hand as you also straighten your right knee, coming back into a standing position. Prepare for your next posture.
- Another option for exiting this position is to place both hands on the ground under the shoulders and step the right leg back into a plank to move on to other positions.

ADJUSTMENTS

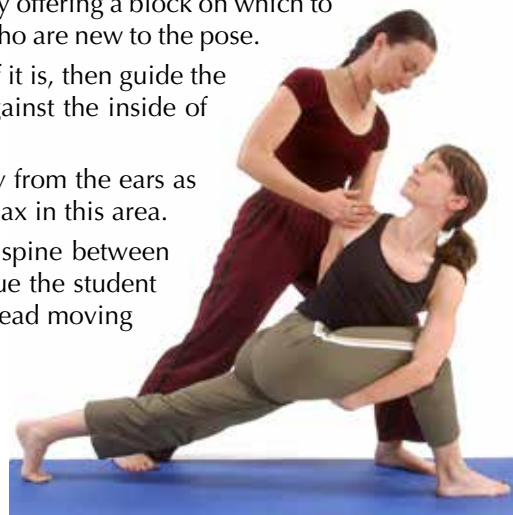
Balance—Enable the student to stay in position with greater stability by offering a block on which to place the lower hand. This option should be used with all students who are new to the pose.

Bent leg—Check that the student's bent knee is not rotating inward. If it is, then guide the knee into deeper external rotation by gently pressing your hand against the inside of the student's leg, slightly above the knee.

Shoulders—Instruct students that the shoulders should be as far away from the ears as possible. Gently touch the tops of the shoulders as a reminder to relax in this area.

Spine—If the student is rounding the spine, gently touch the upper spine between the shoulder blades as a reminder to elongate through this area. Cue the student to visualize the spine as a long straight line, with the crown of the head moving away from the back foot.

Overhead extended arm—The arm extended over the ear must be rotated externally to open the chest and shoulders. Be sure that the student's palm faces down toward the ground. Stand or kneel behind the student and hold the upper arm while gently rolling the elbow toward the ground. Use the side of your body to stabilize the student if necessary.



Adjustment: shoulders.

MODIFICATIONS

Difficulty in rotating and balancing—Cue the student to lower the back knee onto the ground, square the hips, and bring the lower arm to the outside of the opposite leg, either to the ground or to a block. The student can then rotate and open the body with more ease. From there, the student can lift the back knee off the ground if so desired.

Back knee pain—If the back knee is uncomfortable on the ground, provide the student with extra padding, such as a blanket or small pillow.

Tight shoulders—The hands can be in prayer position (Anjali Mudra) so that the bottom elbow is used to press against the top or outside of the bent thigh in order to create more leverage for rotating the shoulders open.

Posture deepening—Binding the arms gives a deeper stretch in the chest and shoulders. Instruct the student as follows: “Bend the elbow that is placed to the outside of your bent knee, then rotate your forearm inward so that it goes under your thigh. Lower your rib cage slightly further toward your front thigh and reach your lower hand toward the outside of the same-side hip. Next, bend the opposite (top) elbow and rotate the front of the shoulder toward the sky (hyperextending the shoulder). Bring the back of that hand against your spine, reaching toward the opposite hand.” If the student cannot quite clasp the hands together, provide a strap and work the hands toward each other. Make sure that the strap remains securely on the upper hamstrings for comfort. This positioning stretches the chest and the front of the shoulders more intensely. You can move students deeper into the position if they are stable by moving the hip of the bent knee toward the back foot, thus creating more space in the torso.



Modification: difficulty in rotating and balancing.



Modification: deepening the posture.

KINEMATICS

This posture uses a considerable amount of energy due to the stability and concentration required to maintain both balance and alignment. Most students will be comfortable practicing any of the modified versions of the pose.

Parivrtta Parshvakonasana (Flexing and Rotating to the Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle inversion, stability	Anterior tibialis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Quadriceps (E, I)	Hip adductors
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	
	Hip flexion, abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata (E, I)	
	External rotation of femur, stability	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	External rotation of femur, stability	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas, hip adductors
	Hip extension, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Torso (R and L)	Trunk stability	Erector spinae, internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Torso (R)	Rotation to right	Internal obliques, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	External obliques
Torso (L)	Rotation to right	External obliques (C, I)	Internal obliques, quadratus lumborum
Shoulder (R and L)	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Shoulder (R)	Humerus flexion	Anterior deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Posterior deltoids, serratus anterior
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Humerus abduction, shoulder stability	Deltoids, infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Slight hyperextension of humerus, stability	Posterior deltoid, teres major, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R)	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (L)	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, digitorum superficialis, palmaris longus
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Stability	Sternocleidomastoid, splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana

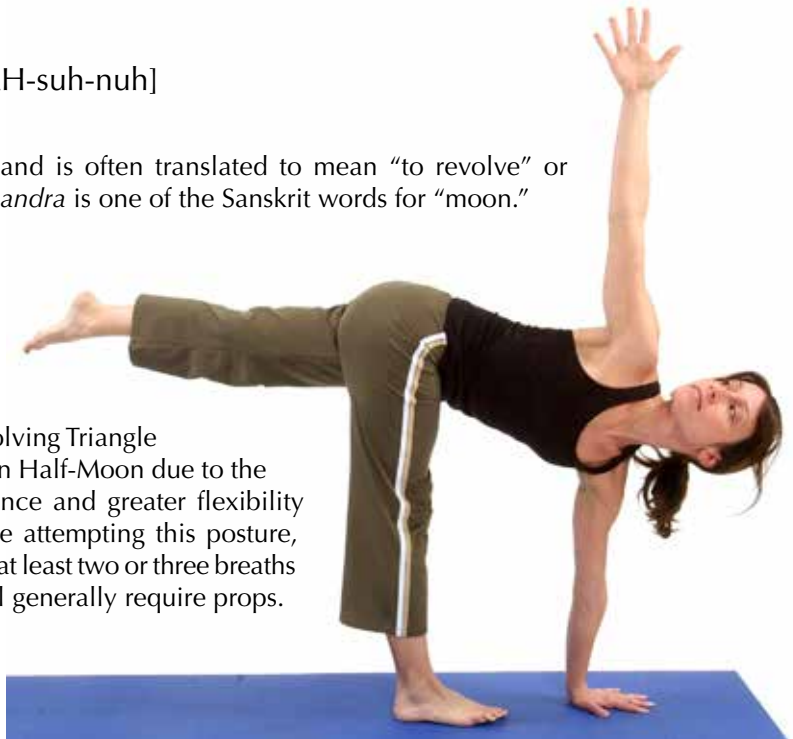
Revolving Half-Moon Pose

[par-ee-VRT-tuh AR-dhuh chuhn-DRAAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Parivrtta* means “the other side” and is often translated to mean “to revolve” or “revolving.” *Ardha* is Sanskrit for “half,” and *chandra* is one of the Sanskrit words for “moon.”

DESCRIPTION

Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana is basically the half-moon posture with the upper torso revolving to the opposite side. One can enter this posture from either Ardha Chandrasana (Half-Moon Pose) or Parivrtta Trikonasana (Revolving Triangle Pose). This asana is much more challenging than Half-Moon due to the twist, which requires greater strength for balance and greater flexibility to rotate and remain open in the chest. Before attempting this posture, beginning students should be able to balance for at least two or three breaths in the other standing balance postures, and will generally require props.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Balance evenly between the metatarsal heads and the heel of the standing foot. Root through the big toe, with the little toe acting as a counterbalance.

BENEFITS

- Improves flexibility and strength in the hips and torso.
- Builds balance and focus.
- Increases stamina.
- Tones the abdominal muscles.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Weakness or dizziness—Anyone feeling weak or dizzy should skip this posture.

Back or neck concerns—Anyone with acute back injury should avoid this pose. Those with neck issues should practice with caution or modification.

Pregnancy—It is inadvisable to attempt this posture during pregnancy due to the extreme rotation in the torso.

VERBAL CUES

- From Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle), extending to the right side, exhale and draw the crease of your right hip back toward your left heel. Place your hands on your hips and slowly rotate the front of your left hip toward your inner thigh. Press firmly through your left foot for grounding and balance.
- Bend your right knee and rotate it slightly outward. Fold forward more deeply from your hips and place your left fingertips on the ground approximately 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters) in front of your right foot.

- Root through your right foot and on an inhalation begin to transfer the weight of your left leg forward over your right foot and left hand. Breathe steadily, and when you feel balanced, slowly lift your left foot off the ground.
- Look down at the ground as you straighten your right leg. Maintain length on all sides of your spine. When you find your balance and alignment in your hips, continue reaching out of your extended back leg. Lengthen the front of your spine and rotate the right side of your torso toward the sky.
- Roll your right shoulder blade back and down toward your hips. Lift your right arm toward the sky and keep length in your neck. Anchor strongly into the right leg, using your left hand to guide your balance.
- Continue to focus on your breath, pressing strongly through your non-weight-bearing leg. Spread the left toes to keep the foot active and feel a line of energy moving from the shoulders through the entire left leg.
- To exit this position, inhale and slowly bend your right knee while setting your left foot back on the ground. Your chest will naturally rotate forward out of the twist. Take another breath, and on the next inhalation straighten your right leg and lift your torso. Exhale and bring your arms to your sides. Prepare for the next posture.

ADJUSTMENTS

Support foot—Instruct students to spread the toes and keep the supporting knee aligned with the foot, drawing energy up through the arch. Remind them to spread the toes and press through the back lifted foot and leg.

Balance—To help a student maintain balance, stand on the side of the elevated leg and use your hip or ribs to provide support. Place the hand closest to the student's legs on the top hip, to provide support and to slightly draw the hip away from the lower ribcage. Use your other hand to lift or gently guide the top shoulder toward the opposite side of the body for greater rotation.

Hips—Create alignment in the hips by encouraging the student to point the hip of the lifted leg toward the standing leg as much as possible. Brush your fingertips on the crease of the standing hip to encourage length in the torso.

Exiting the posture—To come out of this posture, students need to focus on moving slowly and being mindful of body positioning. Focusing on the breath enables them to exit the posture as gracefully and purposefully as possible. To assist a student physically, stand to the side of the weight-bearing leg with your hip blocking the student's hip. Place your closest hand on the student's upper shoulder and your other hand on the opposite hip and gently guide the person to unwind and come upright.



Adjustment: balance.

MODIFICATIONS

Difficulty reaching ground with hand—If a student has difficulty lowering to the ground while maintaining balance, provide a block or the seat of a chair for the lower hand. This modification should also be used by most students who are new to this pose to help provide balance and alignment without strain.

Balance—You can help students establish and maintain balance in a number of ways. One way is to instruct them to keep the upward rotating hand on the hip instead of extending the hand toward the sky. Students can also place the hands against a wall for support or place the sole of the lifted foot against a wall for stability.

Strength building, balance building, weakness, or pregnancy—Instruct students to start with a “baby” Revolving Half-Moon to build strength, flexibility, and balance. Starting with the hands and knees on the ground, students place the left hand on the ground to the outside of the right knee. Instruct them to rotate the torso to the right and rest the right hand on the right hip or extend the right hand in the air as they lift and extend the left leg back. Some students may require the use of a block under the forearms and a blanket under the knees.



Modification: strength building, balance building, weakness, or pregnancy.

KINEMATICS

Because the lifted leg has nothing to press against, more effort is required to keep the spine lengthened and to open the chest. This posture requires the deeper stabilizing musculature of the hips, pelvis, and spine to achieve and maintain alignment and balance.

Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana (Standing on Right Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus, anterior tibialis (I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway and contract and relax as needed	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals, posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (C, I)	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus
Thigh (R)	Knee extension, patellar elevation, stability	Quadriceps (C, I)	Adductors, gracilis
Thigh (L)	Knee extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Flexion, stability	Hamstrings, adductors (E, I)	Hamstrings
	Hip stability	Gluteus medius and minimus (C, I)	
	External rotation of femur	Gluteus maximus, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Torso (R and L)	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Torso (R)	Trunk rotation to right	Internal obliques, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	Erector spinae, external obliques
Torso (L)	Trunk rotation to right	External obliques (C, I)	Quadratus lumborum, erector spinae, internal obliques
Shoulder	Humerus abduction, shoulder stability	Deltoids, infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Supporting posture in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus and teres minor with some posterior deltoid (C, I)	

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm (R)	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R)	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (L)	Wrist hyperextension, stability, finger extension	Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis; extensor carpi ulnaris; extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, digitorum superficialis, palmaris longus
Neck	Stability	Sternocleidomastoid, splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.



Utkatasana

Fierce, or Chair Pose

[OOT-kuht-AAH-suh-nuh]

This pose is fierce (*utkata* in Sanskrit) because when practicing it, one draws energy from and builds strength in the thighs and hips, wherefrom warriors drew much of their power and virility in Indian mythology. Thus Utkatasana is a very symbolic pose. Many yoga styles simply call the pose "chair pose," as it resembles someone sitting.

DESCRIPTION

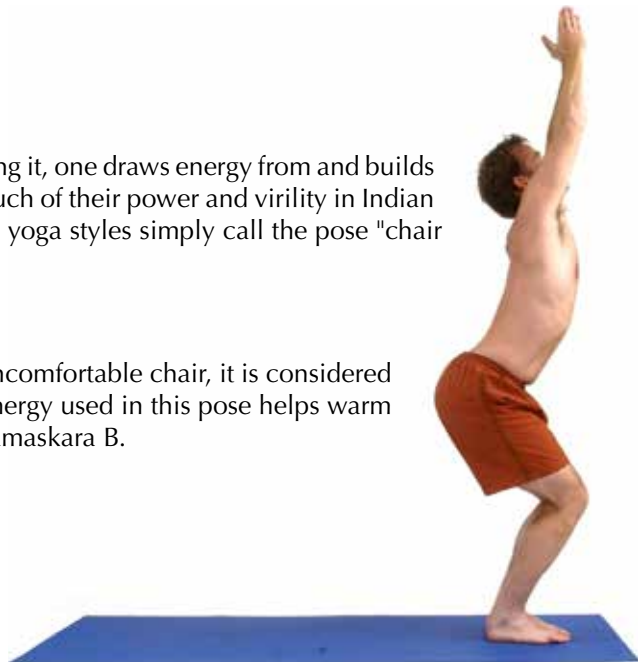
Although the positioning appears as if one is sitting in an uncomfortable chair, it is considered a semi-standing squat with the arms lifted overhead. The energy used in this pose helps warm the muscles in a short time. This posture is part of Surya Namaskara B.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through both heels. Anchor with the metatarsal heads. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.



BENEFITS

- Builds strength and endurance in the hips and thighs.
- Improves balance.
- Stabilizes and balances the knee joint musculature.
- Opens and tones the chest and shoulders.

⚠ CAUTION

Knee injury—Those with knee pain or injury should avoid bending the knees deeply.

VERBAL CUES

- Begin from Tadasana (Mountain Pose) with your feet and legs parallel and your toes and knees pointed forward. Inhale and raise your arms forward and parallel to the ground with your palms facing each other. Feel your shoulders soften. Press your palms together; you may keep your hands shoulder-width apart if that is more comfortable for you.
- Softly elongate your neck so that your ears move up away from your shoulders. Keep your chest lifted and continue to lengthen through your entire spine.
- On the next inhalation, raise your arms higher so that your hands are overhead. Soften through your shoulders.
- Exhale and bend your hips, knees, and ankles. As you lower your torso, try to keep your hips aligned slightly behind the line of your heels and to keep your knees back behind your toes. Engage the muscles in the back of your thighs and in your buttocks and imagine them helping to hold your thighs up; this stabilizes the knee and hip joints.
- Continue to connect with your breath, keeping an even rhythm as the effort in your legs increases.

- Feel your sit bones sink downward and notice the extension in your low spine. Gaze forward as you draw your thumbs up and back to open your shoulder joints. Take time to breathe deeply, opening your chest and relaxing your shoulder blades down slightly from your ears.
- Be sure that your neck is comfortable so there is space in the back of your neck. If you are uncomfortable at all in your neck or shoulders, lower your arms so that they are parallel to the ground, as at the beginning.
- Feel the energy of your inner thighs drawing together without moving your legs and keep your knees aligned behind the line of your toes. Notice that your hips feel as if they are being pulled backward and down, as if you were preparing to sit. At the same time, allow your rib cage to lift toward the sky.
- Find yourself in the space where you are the most comfortably challenged and continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this posture, inhale deeply as you straighten your hips and knees. Exhale and lower your arms back to your sides in Tadasana.
- A nice countering pose is Uttanasana (Intense Forward Bend), which will balance the intensity of this pose with relaxation.

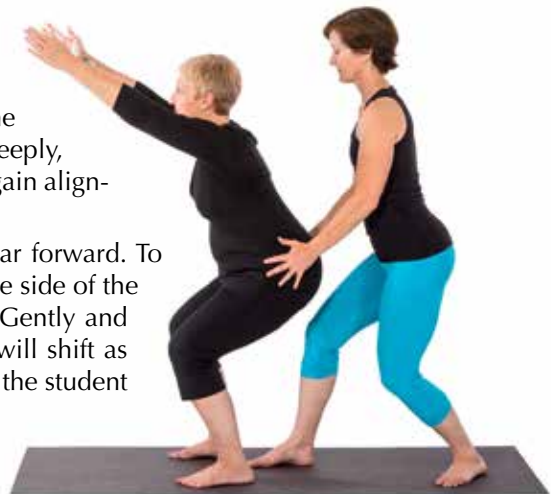
ADJUSTMENTS

Feet and knees—Instruct the student to position the feet so that they point directly forward. If the student's knees are not aligned in the same plane as the feet, gently press against the outsides of the student's knees. Occasionally, a student will attempt to squat too deeply, thus causing the knees to compensate by rotating externally. To regain alignment, instruct the student to straighten up slightly.

Lower extremities—Students often align the hips and knees too far forward. To adjust a student's posture, stand in a semi-squat behind and to one side of the student and place your hands on the sides of the student's hips. Gently and slowly guide the hips backward. Because the student's balance will shift as you move the hips, you must move slowly and with care. Remind the student to direct the sit bones toward the ground in order to keep length in the low spine.

Spine—If the student is standing with an accentuated forward pelvic tilt (swayback), instruct the student to point the sit bones toward the ground and to keep length in the low spine. You can place your hands lightly at the low spine, above the pelvis, as a reminder to lengthen the area. If the student flexes at the hips so much that the chest tilts significantly toward the ground, remind the student to imagine sitting in a chair and to draw the spine toward the seat back. Sometimes straightening the knees a bit helps realign the torso.

Chest—If the student's chest is collapsing inward, help rotate the arms externally to keep the shoulders open. Standing in front of the student, place your hands on the upper arms, and externally rotate the elbows toward each other and toward the midline of the body. Also, you can gently guide the student's thumbs toward the back of the body to open the shoulders even more.



Adjustment: lower extremity.

MODIFICATIONS

Weakness or knee pain—Instruct students not to squat down too far. Focus on the alignment and on lengthening the spine. Over time, invite students to increase the flexion once they have gained muscular strength and muscular endurance.

Balance difficulty and leg weakness—Place the student with the back against the wall for support, both for balance and for gradually gaining strength in the thighs and hips.

Standing instability and late pregnancy—Suggest that students place the feet farther apart for better stability. Remind them, however, to ensure that the knees do not turn inward.

Strength building—Place a towel or small ball between the student's knees and a block between the hands to help target the knee and shoulder alignment. By pressing against the props, the student increases strength at the point of proper alignment.

KINEMATICS

The body positioning of this asana is similar to that of a traditional squat but with the legs closer together. Still, even though no additional load is placed on the body, the alignment in the sagittal plane in this asana helps build and maintain joint stability. To provide a balanced load in the knee joint, cue students to engage the adductors and hamstrings, as well as the quadriceps, for greater comfort and stability. Proper body alignment generally enables synergy in the anterior and posterior musculature.

Utkatasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion, stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus (E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion, stability	Quadriceps (E, I)	
	Knee stability	Hamstrings, popliteus (I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
	Hip stability	Adductors, gluteus maximus (I)	
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae (C, I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
Shoulder	Humeral flexion (90 to 180 degrees)	Anterior deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis; suboccipitals, semispinalis, and upper trapezius (I)	

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

Virabhadrasana I



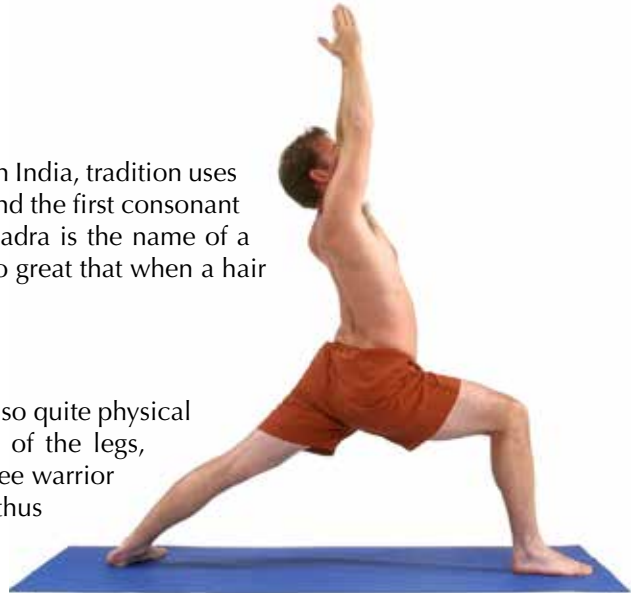
Warrior I

[veer-uhb-huh-DRAAH-suh-nuh kuh]

In the Western hemisphere, this pose is known as Warrior I. In India, tradition uses letters of the alphabet rather than numerals as descriptors, and the first consonant letter of the Sanskrit alphabet is pronounced “kuh.” Virabhadra is the name of a powerful mythical warrior who, according to legend, was so great that when a hair of his dropped to the earth it caused a great army to arise.

DESCRIPTION

Warrior poses are not only symbolic of warrior energy but also quite physical in that they require considerable strength in the muscles of the legs, which represent virility and power. At the same time, all three warrior asanas demand that the chest and heart area remain open, thus illustrating bravery, vulnerability, and openheartedness. The arms and legs are active, while the heart center, when open, banishes the fear of death.



The Warrior I variation is a standing forward lunge. The hips face forward with the legs in the sagittal plane—one leg forward and the other back—instead of having both legs out to the sides (in the frontal plane) as in Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle) and Vrksasana (Tree Pose). Virabhadrasana I works deeply into the hip muscles. In many active vinyasa or Ashtanga classes, it is commonly entered from Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward-Facing Dog).

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the metatarsal heads and the heel of the front foot. Anchor into the outer edge and big toe of the back foot. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens the lower extremities, particularly the thighs.
- Stabilizes the hips, knees, and ankles.
- Builds strength and endurance.
- Opens the shoulders, chest, and abdomen.
- Improves flexibility and stamina in the spine.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee injury—Students with knee pain or injury should be extra careful to flex the knee less than 90 degrees and to prevent the knee from turning inward.

Shoulder concerns—Students with shoulder pain or injury should modify the pose by keeping the arms parallel to the ground, or even with the hands on the hips.

High blood pressure—Students with high blood pressure or other heart concerns should keep the arms parallel to the ground.

VERBAL CUES

- From Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward-Facing Dog), inhale and take a giant step forward with your right leg so that your foot aligns between your hands, with your knee joint stacked over your ankle joint and your toes and knee facing forward. Externally rotate your left foot about 45 degrees and press the outer heel and pinky toe to the ground. (If entering from Tadasana [Mountain Pose], take a large step back with your left leg and align your legs, as just described, then flex your front leg into a lunge.)
- Inhale and raise your torso so that it is perpendicular to the ground and your hips are as level as possible with your front knee. Try to keep your right knee bent at 90 degrees so that your right thigh remains parallel to the ground. Exhale, press your inner thighs toward each other, and feel your left hip draw forward, squaring your hips more evenly under your shoulders.
- Inhale and raise your arms overhead with your palms either pressed together or shoulder-width apart. Soften your shoulders and press your thumbs back slightly to open your chest and shoulder joints. Direct your gaze forward to a distant point on the ground (*drishti*). Keep your chin parallel with the ground.
- Press firmly into the outside of your left foot and heel and continue to draw your inner left thigh toward your right leg. The front of your left pelvis will align slightly behind the line of your right pelvis. Allow your right knee to open slightly toward your right pinky toe.
- As you settle your hips into this pose, imagine sliding your right heel back slightly. This engages the hamstrings and gluteals to help stabilize the knee joint while relieving some of the work in the quadriceps. Connect to the power in your legs.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Inhale and elongate through your lower spine and feel your rib cage lifting and arching back slightly.
- With each exhalation, notice your lower body feeling more grounded. With each inhalation, lift your chest slightly higher; notice a lightness in your upper body.
- Keep your left heel firmly connected to the ground, pressing through the outer edge of the foot, and draw energy up from the arch into your pelvis. This action helps maintain alignment in the pelvis and increases the balance and grounding in the pose.
- Maintain smooth, steady breaths as you feel the strength in the energy of your whole body.
- To exit this position, press through your right leg, extending your knee, and step your left leg forward. Alternatively, you can bend forward at the hips, place your hands on the ground, and step or jump back to flow into another posture.

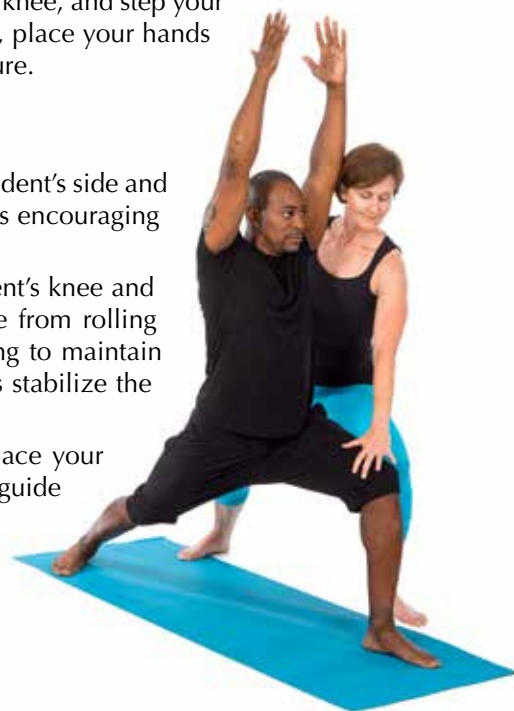
ADJUSTMENTS

Back foot—To help maintain grounding in the back leg, walk to the student's side and use your toes to lightly brush against the outer edge of the heel, thus encouraging the student to press the foot into the ground. Do not push too hard!

Front knee—Lightly touch the medial side (inside) or top of the student's knee and guide the leg into a slight external rotation, which keeps the knee from rolling inward. Instruct the student to lift the arch slightly, while continuing to maintain balanced pressure through the toes and heel. This adjustment helps stabilize the energy through the knee joint.

Hips—To align a student's hips comfortably under the shoulders, place your fingers at the outer edge of the crease in the flexed hip and gently guide the hip back. At the same time, lightly press the back hip forward.

Spine—Remind the student to keep the top of the pelvis level. Brush your hand upward on the low spine, encouraging length through the lower vertebrae.



Adjustment: knee.

Upper torso—Stand behind the student and place your hands on the upper arms, with your thumbs to the inside and your fingers to the outside of the arm, near the shoulders. Gently rotate the student's arms externally, so that the elbows rotate slightly inward and toward each other.

Shoulders—Instruct students to softly draw the shoulders down away from the ears to keep space in the sides of the neck. Place your hands gently on top of the shoulders and press softly downward and outward.

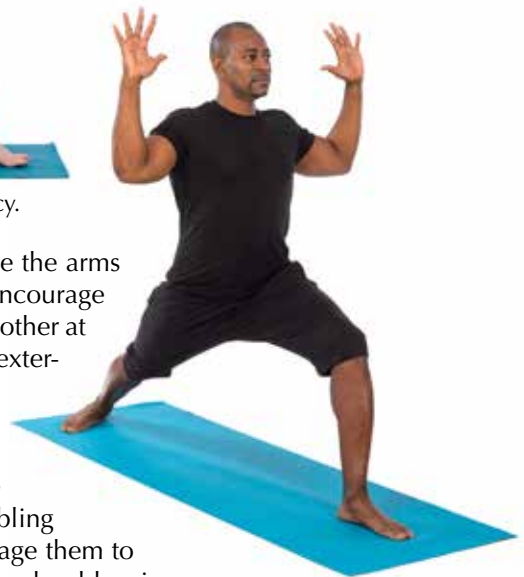
Chest—Remind students to keep the chest lifted. To help physically, place your fingertips or the palm of your hand on the mid spine. Ask the student to lift the back forward and up, away from your hand.

MODIFICATIONS

Weakness, fatigue, or pregnancy—Students can place a chair, stool, or fitness ball under the hips to take some of the body weight off of the front leg. The prop increases stability and balance and reduces the amount of energy needed for maintaining proper position. It also allows students to focus on centering energy and on body alignment. When using a chair, turn it sideways so that the chair back is nearest to the forward leg, thus enabling the student to use the closest hand to hold onto the chair back for support.



Weak shoulders—If a student has an acute shoulder condition with limited range of movement, instruct the student to raise the arms only as high as is comfortable. For a gentle strength-building option, encourage the student to flex the arms at the shoulders with the palms facing each other at shoulder height. Instruct the student to keep the thumbs pointed up or externally rotate the arm so that the palms face upward. The shoulders often fatigue quickly in beginning students and those who are recovering from injury. Invite these students to orient the upper arms out to the sides with the elbows bent at 90 degrees and pointed outward toward the side walls with the fingers extended—in other words, in a shape resembling that of an American football goalpost. For weaker individuals, encourage them to place the hands on the hips, with the fingers pointing back to keep the shoulders in external rotation, and the chest open.



Modification: weak shoulders.

Knee concerns—The lunge in this asana is beneficial in strengthening the quadriceps and aligning the kneecaps. Students with a compromised knee joint should move slowly into and out of this pose and should focus on alignment. Instruct them to flex the front knee only as far as is comfortable, while keeping the hips higher than the knee. They should also keep the front shin perpendicular to the ground and simultaneously engage both the quadriceps and the hamstrings. In another possible modification, “Baby Warrior,” the back knee rests on the ground instead of being straight and lifted. This lunge is similar to that practiced in classical Sun Salutations. For comfort, students often require a soft prop, such as a blanket or towel, under the kneecap on the ground.

KINEMATICS

Because students are so focused on the front knee, they are often unaware that the hips are not aligned and that the hip of the back leg is rotated backward. The more firmly they press through the back foot, the more the hip flexors stretch to allow the pelvis to rotate freely forward. You can help students reorient the hip of the back leg forward, as well as increase balance, by reminding them to imagine drawing the inner thighs toward each other.

Virabhadrasana I (Right Leg Forward)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Slight ankle dorsiflexion, stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus (E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
	Ankle stability	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle inversion, stability	Anterior tibialis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	Peroneals, gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion, stability	Quadriceps (E, I)	
	Knee stability	Hamstrings, popliteus (I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, iliopsoas (I)	
	Hip flexion	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	
	External rotation	Gluteus maximus, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, hamstrings, adductors (I)	Rectus femoris, iliopsoas
	Hip stability, hyperextension	Adductors, gluteus maximus, gluteus medius tensor fascia lata, hamstrings (C, I)	
Torso	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Slight spinal hyperextension and stability	Iliopsoas, rectus abdominis (E, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	Rectus abdominis
Shoulder	Humeral flexion, stability	Deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoids (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Head and fingers	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals (I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.

Virabhadrasana II



Warrior II

[veer-uhb-huh-DRAAH-suh-nuh k-huh]

In the Western hemisphere this pose is known as Warrior II; it is the second asana named after the warrior Virabhadra. The second consonant in Sanskrit is pronounced “k-huh”—similar to that of Warrior I (“kuh”), but in this case the sound is aspirated. As a guide to proper pronunciation, it takes twice as much breath to say “k-huh” as it does to say “kuh.”

DESCRIPTION

This lunge posture is similar to that of Virabhadrasana I, but instead of the chest facing forward in the sagittal plane, the bent leg here is rotated externally, directly out to the side, with the arms abducted and parallel to the ground in the frontal plane. The spine is perpendicular to the ground with the natural curves intact.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadisthana), third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the heel of the flexed leg. Anchor into the heel and outer edge of the extended leg. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.

BENEFITS

- Opens and strengthens the hip musculature.
- Tones the lower extremities.
- Opens and stretches the shoulders, chest, and abdomen.
- Works on subtle alignments of the upper body.
- Opens and strengthens the shoulder joints.
- Builds muscular endurance.
- Tones the abdominal muscles.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee concerns—Students with knee injury or weakness should practice with modification.

Neck concerns—Students with neck injury or pain should avoid turning the head and gaze forward instead.

Pregnancy—After the second trimester, students should proceed with caution and modification.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), inhale and reach your hands over your head. Exhale and lower your arms out to your sides until they are parallel to the ground. Step your right leg out to the side so that your feet are as far apart as your outstretched hands, if doing so is comfortable.

- Rotate your left foot slightly inward toward your right heel and rotate your right leg out at 90 degrees so that a line drawn from the heel of your right foot would bisect your left arch. Press evenly through both feet and breathe comfortably.
- Orient your outstretched arms and shoulders in the frontal plane. Allow your left hip to rotate slightly inward toward the right to protect the structural integrity of your sacrum. Continue to press fully into your left outer heel for anchoring.
- Inhale and elongate through your spine while keeping the top of your pelvis parallel to the ground. Imagine externally rotating both thighs, opening them from the center away from each other. Feel the energy of your legs increase.
- Exhale and turn your head to the right, gazing past your right fingertips. Align your chin with your right shoulder and soften through your neck. If you feel your shoulders rise, rotate your palms upward to encourage your shoulder blades to soften away from your ears.
- Exhale and bend your right knee until your hips and right knee are bent at about 90 degrees. Draw energy upward from your right hamstrings and gluteals by imagining that you are drawing your right heel back, toward your left foot. This action helps to stabilize the knee.
- Continue to extend through your left leg and left arm. Feel your left rib cage press back to keep your torso from rotating too far out of the frontal plane. Allow your front pelvis to naturally turn slightly toward the right for comfort and to support your lower back and sacrum.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Keep your right thigh opening out to the right while rooting through the heel and big toe of your right foot. Visualize a wall behind your back and imagine gently pressing the back of your left thigh, rib cage, and shoulders toward it.
- With each exhalation, let your hips lower toward the ground as you bring the top of your right thigh parallel to the ground. Make certain that your right knee does not extend beyond the line of your right foot.
- To exit the posture, inhale and straighten your right leg. Rotate your toes forward and bring your arms to your sides. Prepare for the next side or asana.

ADJUSTMENTS

Bent knee—Remind students to roll the front thigh outward by lightly brushing your hand against the outside of the knee; alternatively, just point to the knee and remind students verbally. You can also semi-squat behind a student and place one hand on the mid thigh of the flexed leg and the other hand on the outside of the opposite hip for stability. Slowly externally rotate the student's flexed thigh to more fully open the pelvis.

Hips and knees—If a student has difficulty keeping the bent knee and opposite hip apart, place the student's back against a wall so that less energy is expended on balancing and more can be used to consciously open the front of the body. Instruct the student to press the extended leg back toward the wall. To make a hands-on adjustment, stand to the student's back, place one hand on the student's flexed thigh and the other hand on the outside of the opposite thigh, and encourage the student to draw the thighs away from each other.

Hip height—Stand behind the student, place your hands lightly on the outer hips, and guide the pelvis lower. Be sure that the student is both strong and balanced enough to comfortably manage this adjustment. You may need to suggest that the student take the legs farther apart in order to avoid placing excessive stress on the bent knee while working to engage the hips and legs more fully.

Shoulders—Instruct students to relax the shoulders down away from the ears. Place your hands softly on the tops of the shoulders and gently guide them downward.

Spine—If a student's spine leans out over the bent leg such that the spine is no longer perpendicular to the ground, stand behind the student with your hands on the sides of his or her ribcage and lightly guide the torso back to center by gently aligning the



Adjustment: spine.

shoulders over the hips. Instruct the student to guide the pelvis toward the bent knee while keeping the crown of the head pointing directly upward.

MODIFICATION

Pregnancy, weakness, or rehabilitation—Instruct the student to bend the front knee less than 90 degrees. This modification requires less muscular energy and endurance. The student can also use a wall, chair, or fitness ball for support.

KINEMATICS

It is usually best to instruct students to place the feet slightly wider apart than the distance of the outstretched hands, if it is comfortable for them to do so. Otherwise, the feet tend to be too close together when moving into the lunge, and the bent knee extends past the foot, thus causing a loss of stability and alignment and possibly straining the knee structures. A too-narrow stance also makes it harder to open the hip and easier to roll the bent knee inward, thus offsetting the body weight and possibly straining the medial knee. Even when the knee is aligned properly, students must engage the hamstrings to work in synergy with the quadriceps in order to balance the muscular forces through the joint. To help students establish this balance, cue them to root through the front heel.



Modification: pregnancy, weakness, or rehabilitation.

Virabhadrasana II (Right Knee Bent)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion, stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus (E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle inversion, stability	Anterior tibialis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion, stability	Quadriceps (E, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	Adductors
	External rotation, stability	Gluteus medius and minimus (C, I)	
	Abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata (E, I)	
	Hip flexion, abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata (E, I)	

(continued)

Virabhadrasana II (Right Knee Bent) (continued)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension and stability	Gluteus maximus, hamstrings (C, I)	Iliopsoas, adductors
	External rotation, stability	Gluteus maximus, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
	Abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata, gluteus medius, gluteus minimus (I)	
	Pelvic stability	Hamstrings, rectus abdominis (I)	
Torso	Torso stability	Erector spinae, internal and external obliques (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder	Humerus abduction, shoulder stability	Deltoids, infraspinatus, teres minor, supraspinatus, pectoralis major (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Scapular rotation	Serratus anterior, mid and lower trapezius (C, I)	
	Supporting posture in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius, subscapularis (C, I)	
	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus and teres minor with some posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres, pronator quadratus (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Head rotation to right, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, occipitals (C, I)	Sternocleidomastoid
Neck (L)	Head rotation to right	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.

Virabhadrasana III



Warrior III

[veer-uhb-huh-DRAAH-suh-nuh guh]

This is the third warrior position dedicated to the ancient warrior Virabhadra. As with the other two warrior asanas, the designation of this third variation is signified by a Sanskrit consonant sound—in this case the third one, which is “guh.”

DESCRIPTION

This asana can be thought of as a variation of Tadasana (Mountain Pose), which serves as the starting point. In this pose, the arms are extended overhead and the body is flexed at the hip, balanced over one leg, with the upper body and opposite leg parallel to the ground. To create balance and stability, the deeper core and hip muscles are required to work in unison. The pose also requires considerable strength and endurance due to the force of gravity working against both the extended upper body and the outstretched leg. After performing this posture, be sure to counterstretch, with any forward folding asana, to relax both the low back and the hip stabilizers.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Balance evenly between the metatarsal heads and the heel of the standing foot. Root through the big toe, using the little toe as a counterbalance.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens the muscles of the spine, posterior shoulders, and hips.
- Builds stamina, endurance, and balance.
- Opens the chest.
- Promotes awareness of proper hip alignment.
- Builds abdominal strength.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Balance concerns or vertigo—Students with extreme balance difficulty or vertigo should practice with support.
High blood pressure—Students with high blood pressure should practice with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- Begin either from Virabhadrasana I or from Tadasana (Mountain Pose).
- From Virabhadrasana I:
 - With your right leg forward in the lunge, draw back through the crease in your right hip. Rotate your left foot so that the toes point forward and lift the left heel off the ground. Maintain pelvic alignment. Keep your arms overhead with your shoulders soft.
 - Exhale and fold forward at your hips. Straighten your right leg as you begin to lift your left foot off the ground behind you. Balance here for a breath or two.

- Inhale as you move your body weight completely onto your front leg, bringing your torso, arms, and back leg parallel to the ground.
- Root into the big toe and heel of your right foot, directing the energetic balance of your foot from front to back rather than side to side. Slightly guide your left hip inward, toward your inner right thigh to bring the back of your pelvis parallel to the ground.
- Gaze slightly forward, looking toward your hands or somewhere slightly ahead of you on the ground. Keep softness in your neck and relax your shoulders away from your ears. Breathe steadily.
- From Tadasana:
 - Inhale and raise your arms above your head. Relax the top of your shoulders away from your ears. Transfer the weight of your body onto your right leg, then step your left foot straight behind you so that the toes are barely touching the ground. Imagine gently pressing your inner thighs toward your midline to help stabilize your balance. Remain poised here for a couple of breaths. Stay mindful of keeping your hips squared and level.
 - Inhale and lengthen through your spine. Exhale as you slowly begin to fold forward from your right hip while lifting your left leg and lowering your torso until both are parallel to the ground.
 - With each in-breath, continue to extend and lengthen through your arms, torso, and extended back leg. On each exhalation, imagine your left hip rotating inward toward your right thigh to keep your pelvis aligned.
 - Gaze slightly forward toward your hands or somewhere slightly ahead of you on the ground. Draw your shoulders softly away from your ears. Breathe steadily.
 - To exit the pose from either version of entry, inhale and begin to slowly lower the left leg down to the ground as you lift your chest and torso upright. Use the strength of the legs, hips, and lower abdomen to move in a controlled fashion to avoid straining the low back as you lower the leg. Relax your hands to your sides and prepare for the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Standing leg bent—Students often bend the support leg significantly to compensate for balance difficulty or tight hamstrings. Instruct them to spread the toes and straighten the supporting knee. Also, remind students to focus on evenly distributing the body weight on the foot and folding forward only as far as the hamstring comfortably allows with a straight knee. Stand in front of the student to provide balance support as indicated in the balance adjustment description in this list.

Hips—If the hip of the student's lifted leg is higher than the hip of the supported leg, stand to the supporting-leg side and gently hold the student's outer hips. Lower the elevated side of the pelvis so that the hips are aligned in the frontal plane with the rest of the torso. Move slowly and gently so that the student does not lose balance. To keep the student from falling, press your hip against the student's hip as a prop.

Balance—Standing in front of the student, place your outstretched arms under the student's forearms and let the student lean lightly into your arms until balanced. Be sure to remove your arms slowly and only when the student is balanced. Assume a relaxed stance with your knees slightly bent; avoid using your own shoulder or back to hold the student up. Many students, especially beginners, are much more comfortable if they position the arms out to the sides for balance.

Arms—To help a student straighten the arms and lift or press the thumbs higher, stand in front of the student, hold on to the upper arms, and gently rotate the shoulders externally. This adjustment keeps the student from rounding the upper back and aids in strengthening the back and shoulders. Also, you may simply brush your hands on the outsides of the student's arms to cue the student to relax the shoulders away from the ears.



Adjustment: hips.



Adjustment: balance.

MODIFICATIONS

Shoulder or neck tightness or pain—Instruct students to hold the arms at the sides with the hands by the hips. Often, this modification also makes it easier to balance and keep the torso straight.

Balance difficulty and strength building—Place the student's hands on a ballet bar, against a wall, or even on the back of a chair to help provide lift in the upper body and aid in balance. The student can also place the foot of the lifted leg against a wall to build strength and balance.



Modification: balance difficulty and strength building.

Weakness—It is best not to keep anyone in this posture for too long if it is the first time that a student has practiced it or if the student experiences significant weakness—as may be the case for someone recovering from illness or injury.

KINEMATICS

This asana requires a great deal of strength in the low-back and hip-extensor strength to keep the lifted leg parallel to the ground. As an appropriate counterposture, follow this posture with a resting forward bend, such as Uttanasana (Intense Forward Bend).

Virabhadrasana III (Standing on Right Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe flexion	Flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (C, I)	Anterior tibialis
Thigh (R)	Knee extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	
	Stability and adduction	Adductors (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion and stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	
	Hip stability	Gluteus medius and minimus, adductors (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	

(continued)

Virabhadrasana III (Standing on Right Leg) (continued)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
Shoulder	Humeral flexion, stability	Anterior deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior
	Maintenance of humeral flexion against gravity	Deltoids, rhomboids, trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation, stability	Infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction, stability	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Stability	Subscapularis (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, suboccipitals, (C, I)	

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.

Parshvottanasana



Intense Side Stretch

[paarsh-voht-taahn-AHH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Parshva* means “side” or “flank,” and *ottana* means “intense extension or stretch”; thus *parshvottanasana* indicates an intense stretch in the side.

DESCRIPTION

Parshvottanasana is similar to Uttanasana (Intense Forward Bend), but in this case one leg is forward and the other is back. This placement of the legs requires more balance and creates a deeper stretch through the hips, hamstrings, and sides. The arms are in Anjali Mudra, or Prayer Pose, behind the back, if doing so is comfortable. The stretch extends from the backs of the heels all the way up into the neck, thus releasing tension throughout the entire back of the body.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the metatarsal heads and the heel of the front foot. Anchor into the outer edge and big toe of the back foot. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.

BENEFITS

- Relieves stiffness in the neck, shoulders, elbows, and wrists.
- Opens the chest.
- Increases balance.
- Stimulates the abdominal organs.
- Provides deep stretch for the legs, hips, and side torso.
- Relieves arthritis in the neck and spine.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Glaucoma or high blood pressure—In general, students with glaucoma or high blood pressure should not place the head below the heart; therefore, modifications should be used.

Shoulder injury—Anyone with a shoulder injury should practice a modified version of hand placement.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), step your legs apart a distance of three to four feet (about one meter). Turn to the right so that your right leg is forward, your left leg is back, and your torso is aligned with your right leg. Rotate your left foot and thigh slightly toward the right. Adjust the width of your feet so that you can keep your left heel on the ground. Gently press your inner thighs toward each other to help align your hips forward.

- Press the palms of your hands together behind your back with the fingertips pointed up. Draw the tips of your fingers up your spine. Go only as far as it feels comfortably challenging to go; never force or strain! Keep the front of your shoulders rolling open. If this positioning is not comfortable for your wrists or shoulders, modify by either grasping opposite elbows or clasping your hands together behind your back with the knuckles pointing down.
- Continue to focus on your breath as you soften the shoulders and open the chest.
- Continue to press your inner thighs toward each other, drawing your left hip slightly forward and your right hip backward. Lift your low back, ribs, and chest away from your hips as you breathe in deeply. Keep your gaze focused forward as you gently arch backward from your upper back, widening your collarbones. Relax your shoulders and maintain even length in your neck.
- Exhale, drawing your right hip back slightly. Take your time as you begin to slowly fold forward until either your spine is parallel with the ground or you feel the first point of resistance in your muscles. Keep your pelvis aligned and continue to root through your feet.
- With the next exhalation, relax your torso farther down over your right leg as much as you can without rounding your back. Feel the left side of your rib cage move inward slightly toward your right thigh.
- As you inhale, feel your torso lengthen from your hips to the top of your head. Imagine lengthening your chest out beyond your toes. Relax your neck and soften your abdomen as you breathe deeply into your back and hips. Feel the balance in your feet from front to back and press firmly through your back heel.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Continue gently moving your right hip back. You should feel your right hip and hamstring lengthening deeply and use your left leg as an anchoring force.
- To come out of this position, press down firmly through both feet and extend upward through the crown of your head. Relax your hands and bring them to your sides as you prepare for the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Front hip—Standing either behind or to the side of the student, use your fingertips to gently guide the front hip back and square the hips forward in the sagittal plane.

Rib cage—Stand behind the student to the side of the back leg. Place your closest hand on the opposite side of the student's rib cage and your other hand on the side of the rib cage nearest you. Use your hip as a prop to keep the student balanced. With a light touch, slightly rotate the nearest side toward you and the far side ribs toward the inner thigh of the student's front leg, so that the chest points more directly toward the ground.

Shoulders—Gently place your hands on top of the student's shoulders and guide the shoulders down away from the ears. With your fingertips lightly on the student's anterior (front) shoulders, draw the shoulder blades toward each other to open the chest more fully.

Neck—Lightly touch the back of the student's head as a reminder to release tension held there.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight shoulders—If a student cannot comfortably place the palms together behind the back, instruct the student to place the arms behind the waist and clasp the opposite elbows. Alternatively, instruct the student to clasp the hands behind the body with the elbows straight. As the student folds forward, she or he can lift the arms to help stretch the front of the shoulders and expand the chest. When the student moves to the other side, invite him or her to place the other forearm or thumb on top in order to maintain energetic synergy in the pose.



Adjustment: rib cage.



Modification: tight shoulders.

Increased shoulder stretch—For students who can press the palms together, instruct them to point the elbows up toward the sky.

Tight hamstrings—If the hamstring stretch is too intense, instruct the student to bend the front leg slightly, taking care not to let the knee turn inward if it is bent. Also, remind all students to refrain from folding deeper than the hamstring is comfortable going.

Rounded back—Cue the student to refrain from folding down toward the thigh all the way. Invite the student to keep the back parallel to the ground. Also, for some students, it is best to cue the leg positioning, but instead of reaching the arms behind the back invite them to place the hands on the hips or against a chair or wall. This modification is appropriate for persons with glaucoma.



Modification: rounded back; tight hamstrings.

KINEMATICS

As in Virabhadrasana I (Warrior I), the more firmly the student presses through the back foot, the more the hip flexors stretch to allow the pelvis to rotate forward. This action also helps create better balance as the student folds forward and deepens the stretch in the hip extensors. The arm kinematics shown in the chart reflect arms in reverse Anjali Mudra (Prayer Position)—that is, with the palms together behind the back.

Parshvottanasana (Right Leg Forward)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	Anterior tibialis
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion, stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals (E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Thigh	Knee extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Flexion, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas
	Slight external rotation, stability	Deep external rotators,* gluteus maximus (C, I)	
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	

(continued)

Parshvottanasana (Right Leg Forward) *(continued)*

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Shoulder	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	Pectoralis major, anterior deltoid, coracobrachialis
	Postural support in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Hyperextension of humerus	Posterior deltoid, latissimus dorsi, teres major (C, I)	
Lower arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales manus (C, I)	
Neck	Extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, upper trapezius (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.

Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana



Extended Hand-to-Toe Pose

[oot-T-HEE-tuh HAAS-tuh paah-daahng-oost-AHH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Utthita* means “extended,” *hasta* means “hand,” *pada* means either “leg” or “foot,” and *gusth* means “big toe.” Though the name of this asana refers to a number of different positions, in the standing position it usually refers to standing on one leg with the other leg extended parallel to the ground while holding onto the big toe of the lifted foot.

DESCRIPTION

This asana uses strength in the hip flexors and quadriceps of both the standing and (especially) the flexed leg. Once you are balanced on one leg and holding onto the big toe of the lifted leg with either your fingers or a strap, this is generally the end of the pose. However, from this position, the lifted leg can be abducted to the side, then brought back to the center, with the torso flexed forward before finally lowering the leg slowly to the ground.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the heel and the first metatarsal head of the front foot. Anchor into the heel.

BENEFITS

- Increases concentration and balance.
- Builds stability and strength.
- Balances stability and symmetry in the pelvis and spine.
- Tones the abdominal muscles.

⚠ CAUTION

Lower back injury—Students with a lower back injury should practice with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- Starting from Tadasana (Mountain Pose), shift your weight more fully onto your right leg. Place your hands on your hips for stability and roll your front shoulders and chest open. Exhale as you bend your left hip and knee, drawing your thigh up toward your chest. Breathe here, maintaining balance.
- Keep your right hand on your right hip, and reach down with the first two fingers of your left hand to hook your big toe. Maintain length in your spine and keep your chest lifted. Take your time as you sustain your alignment and balance. Slowly begin to straighten your left leg out in front of you so that it is parallel to the ground.

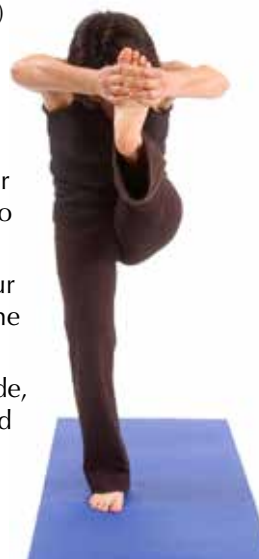


Position one.



Position two.

- Inhale and lengthen your spine while rolling (externally rotating) your front shoulders back to open your chest more fully. Press firmly into your standing leg so that the top of your pelvis remains in neutral position. Keep your shoulders aligned over your hips.
- Focus your gaze on a *drishti* somewhere out in front of your body so that nothing in your peripheral vision causes you to lose your balance.
- Draw your left hip back and down to maintain balance in your pelvis. Press firmly through your right leg (see position one photo). This may be the end of the pose.
- Remain in this position or rotate your left leg out to the left side, grounding your balance through your right heel. Turn your head and slowly gaze over your right shoulder. Keep your hand on your right hip or extend your right arm out to the right side, parallel to the ground, as a counter balance.
- As you inhale, elongate your neck and continue to point your chin out over your right shoulder to keep the openness in your chest and shoulders (see position two photo).
- Exhale and slowly bring your left leg and head forward again. Keep your shoulders relaxed and your chest lifted. Bend your left arm, pointing your elbow out to the left, and lift your left foot slightly higher, as far as feels comfortable.
- On an exhalation, fold from your hips as far as possible and draw your head toward your left knee. You can hold onto the left foot with both hands if that is more accessible (see position three photo).
- Inhale and stand fully upright, moving your chest away from your thigh. Exhale and bring your hands back to your hips, holding your left leg in place in front of you for a couple more breaths before gently lowering the foot to the ground (see position four photo). Prepare for the next side.



Position three.



Position four.

ADJUSTMENTS

Standing foot—If the supporting foot is not pointed directly forward under the knee joint, students will have difficulty maintaining balance. Remind them to keep the toes and knees pointed forward and aligned under the hips.

Legs—Stand in front of the student and provide gentle support to the lifted leg. Hold the leg lightly at the heel. You can help the student rotate the leg slowly to the side as you help with balance.

Hips—To help the student maintain hip alignment and keep the top of the pelvis parallel to the ground, stand behind the student and lightly place your hands on the sides of the hips as you make the necessary adjustment. Proceed with a light touch.

Shoulders—Be sure that the student's shoulders do not roll forward, thus closing off the chest and rounding the upper back. Stand behind the student and place one hand lightly between the shoulder blades. Instruct the student to draw the shoulder blades toward your hand. This adjustment opens the front shoulders and lifts the chest.

MODIFICATIONS

Hamstrings or hip tightness—Give the student a strap to wrap around the foot as an extension of the arms. This modification allows the student to keep the spine straight and aids significantly in balance. If no strap is available, you can instruct the student to keep the knees bent slightly and place the hands behind the thigh for support. Doing so helps alleviate strain in the low back.

Increase strength and flexibility—Students can rest the lifted foot against a wall, chair back, or ballet bar as they focus on spinal alignment while building strength and flexibility in the legs.



Modification: hamstrings or hip tightness.

Lower back injury or weakness—Instruct the student to sit in a chair or on a fitness ball in order to focus on balance and flexibility while flexing the hip and extending the knee.

KINEMATICS

An added benefit of this posture is the subtle strengthening and stretching of the posterior shoulder in the arm that reaches for the extended foot. To give a student the feeling of elongation in the back of the body, place the back against the wall and direct the student to press the shoulder blades toward the wall. This action helps create proper alignment, which aids balance in the long run.

Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana (Standing on Right Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus, anterior tibialis (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps (C, I)	
	Stability, adduction	Adductors (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps, adductor magnus (C, I)	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip extension, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	
	Hip stability	Gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus; adductors; deep external rotators* (I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris, pectineus, tensor fascia lata (C, I)	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus, deep external rotators*
Torso	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
Shoulder (R)	Humerus abduction	Deltoids, supraspinatus (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	External humeral rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, trapezius (C, I)	

(continued)

Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana (Standing on Right Leg) (continued)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Shoulder (L)	Shoulder flexion	Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Posterior deltoid, rhomboids
	External humeral rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Stability	Latissimus dorsi (C, I)	
	Scapular stability	Serratus anterior, pectoralis minor (I)	
Upper arm (R)	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, brachialis (C, I)	
Upper arm (L)	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Lower arm (R)	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Lower arm (L)	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres, pronator quadratus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R)	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (L)	Finger flexion	Flexor digitorum, superficialis and profundus; lumbricales manus; interossei palmaris (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae (C, I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.

Natarajasana



King Dancer

[nut-tuh-raahj-AHH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *Nata* means “dancer,” and *raja* means “royal.” This posture symbolizes one of the many forms of Shiva (a Hindu god) as Lord of the Dance.

DESCRIPTION

Natarajasana is a one-legged balance posture with a backbend and is indeed rather regal looking with the “puffed-out” chest. The non-weight-bearing leg is extended behind the back, and the arms reach either overhead or behind the back to the foot. This posture has many variations. Most people cannot achieve the back arch and shoulder opening of the original posture, so a modified version is generally taught. The posture is described here in three phases, building from the least demanding to the most.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy, fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root through the first metatarsal head and heel.

BENEFITS

- Stretches the chest and shoulders deeply.
- Enhances balance and concentration.
- Lengthens and strengthens the front of the torso and spine.
- Stretches the quadriceps and iliopsoas (deep hip flexors) in the non-weight-bearing leg.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Acute back pain—Students with acute low back injury should refrain performing from the back-arching phase of this posture.

Pregnancy—Pregnant students should practice phase one.

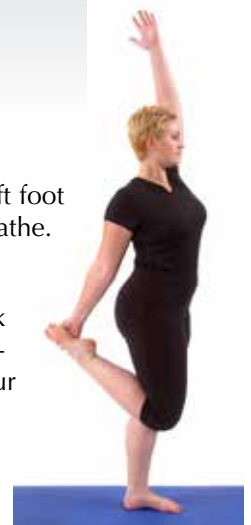
Weakness—Students feeling weakness should practice phase one.

VERBAL CUES

From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), bring your hands to your hips and shift your weight to your left foot without allowing your right hip to drop. Find your *drishti* (gazing point) and remain focused. Breathe.

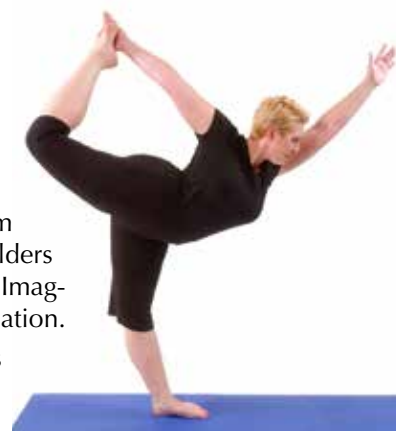
Phase One

- Bend your right knee and bring your right heel toward your buttocks. Inhale and reach back with your right hand to grasp your right foot or ankle. Hold wherever you can do so comfortably with your hand or a strap, making sure that there is no strain in your low back. Flex your right foot so that the toes point toward the right knee.
- Inhale, lifting your ribs away from your hips, and begin to press your right thigh slightly back while keeping your hips stable and aligned under your shoulders. Draw your inner thighs toward the midline of your body so that your bent leg does not abduct or rotate externally.
- Continue to focus on your breath. This may be the end of the pose.



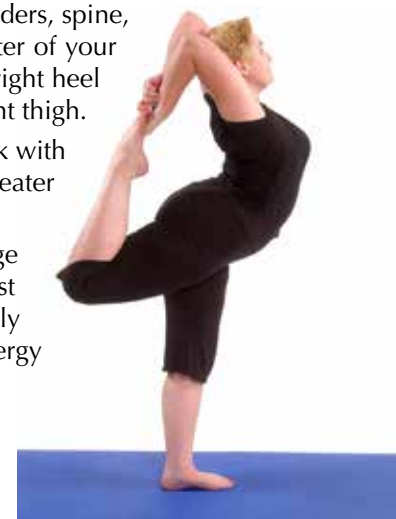
Phase Two

- Inhale and raise your left arm overhead while lifting the rib cage. As you exhale, keep your pelvis level and your chest lifted while bending forward slightly from your left hip joint.
- Create a slight backbend as you strive to stretch your hips and rib cage away from each other, opening up your chest and abdomen. Keep the front of your shoulders opening away from your chest by drawing your shoulder blades softly together. Imagine your collarbones moving away from the center of your chest on each inhalation.
- Gaze up toward your left fingertips. Keep your neck long. Imagine your pelvis and the crown of your head stretching away from each other with each breath.
- Continue to focus on your breath. This may be the end of the pose.



Phase Three

- If you feel comfortably balanced and have substantial flexibility in your shoulders, spine, and hips, stand straight instead of flexing forward at the hips. Press the center of your chest upward toward the sky as you arch your mid back slightly. Draw your right heel up toward your shoulder blades. Feel the deep stretch in the front of your right thigh.
- Hold your right leg in place while stretching both arms overhead. Reach back with your hands and grasp your right foot or ankle. Use a strap to hold the foot for greater comfort.
- Maintain the upright position of your spine and continue to lift your rib cage out of your low back area. With every inhalation, lift higher and feel your chest puff open. Maintain your grip on the foot, lifting it as high as you comfortably can and imagining it to move toward the back of your head. Feel the arc of energy through your torso as you root into the ground with your left leg.
- To exit this posture, slowly release your foot and bring your arms back to your sides. Lower your leg to the ground and prepare to practice on the other side. Counter this pose with Adho Mukha Shvanasana (Downward-Facing Dog) or Balasana (Child's Pose).



ADJUSTMENTS

Balance—Stand in front of the student and hold onto the top hand with one or both of your hands. Extend the student's arm overhead, lifting slowly. You may need to place your hand on the hip of the student's supporting leg for stability. Release the student slowly so that he or she maintains balance.

Non-weight-bearing leg—Stand behind or to the side of the student and gently tap the front of the thigh, cueing the student to lift the thigh higher behind the body. You can also place your hand gently under the student's heel to aid in balance while helping to lift the leg higher, if doing so is comfortable.

Low back—Students often arch the low back or abduct the leg to reach the foot; both moves can aggravate the lower back. To adjust, stand to the side of the student and place one hand on the student's hip and the other on the shoulder. Help the student maintain alignment and balance as she or he slowly draws the foot toward the hand.

Shoulders—Stand behind the student, place your hands on the student's upper arms, and rotate the shoulders externally and down away from the ears.



Adjustment: low back.

MODIFICATIONS

Building flexibility—For students with very tight quadriceps, modify the position by wrapping a strap around the lifted ankle or foot. For those with slightly more flexibility, simply instruct the student to grasp the ankle or foot while drawing the heel toward the buttocks. This is also a good counterstretch for Padangusthasana (Entended Hand-to-Toe Pose).

Tight shoulders—Make sure that the student's arms are rotated externally as they reach overhead by keeping the elbows parallel to each other. If the elbows point away from the body, then the arms are not externally rotated and it will be difficult or impossible to reach the hands closer to the foot. If comfortable for the student, a strap can be wrapped around the upper arms to achieve and maintain shoulder alignment.

Pregnancy, weakness, or acute low-back concerns—Ask the student to stay in phase one of the posture. For increased balance, instruct the student to practice near a wall or place a sturdy chair in front or to the side of the student for extra support.



Modification:
building flexibility.

KINEMATICS

People with sufficient flexibility in the shoulders, hips, and spine can arch the back so that the foot touches the back of the head.

Natarajasana, Phase Three (Standing on Left Leg)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum (C)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe abduction, foot stability	Dorsal interossei, abductor digiti minimi brevis, abductor hallucis (C, I)	
	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexor digitorum longus and brevis, flexor hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion, ankle plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (C, I)	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus
Lower leg (L)	Stability to counter body sway (muscles relaxing and contracting as necessary to maintain balance)	Peroneals, anterior and posterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, flexor digitorum longus, flexor hallucis longus (C, E, I)	
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	Quadriceps
	Thigh adduction, stability	Adductors (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension, patellar elevation	Quadriceps, gracilis, adductor magnus (C, I)	
	Stability, adduction	Adductors (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip hyperextension, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip stability	Gluteus maximus and medius, hamstrings, adductors, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	

(continued)

Natarajasana, Phase Three (Standing on Left Leg) *(continued)*

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Torso	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
Shoulder	Hyperflexion, humerus adduction	Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Posterior deltoid
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius, (C, I)	
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Scapular stability	Serratus anterior (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow flexion, stability	Triceps brachii, biceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei palmaris, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae (I)	

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

C = concentric contraction, E = eccentric contraction, I = isometric contraction, L = left, and R = right.