

Malasana



Basic Squat, or Bead Pose

[maahl-AAH-suh-nuh]

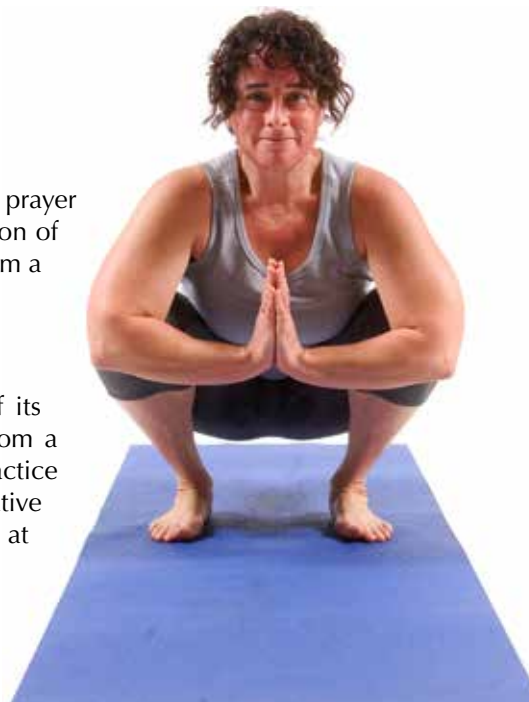
In Sanskrit, *mala* means “bead,” and in yoga tradition a string of prayer beads is referred to as a *mala*. It is thought that the squatting position of this posture makes a person appear to resemble a bead dangling from a string. The pose is also commonly called Garland Pose.

DESCRIPTION

Malasana is considered a seated posture in this text because of its grounding nature. It is a good transitional asana when moving from a standing pose to a seated one; it is also a good pose for vinyasa practice when moving from one posture to the next. Because of the restorative nature of Malasana, it can be incorporated into a practice session at any time.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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



FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

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

BENEFITS

- Stretches the back muscles.
- Opens the pelvic area.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Strengthens the abdominals.
- Stabilizes and builds strength in the ankles and feet.

⚠ CAUTION

Knee or ankle concerns—Students with a knee injury should either practice with modifications or skip this pose.

VERBAL CUES

- From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), place your feet hip-width apart with your toes pointed straight ahead or slightly out to the sides. Be sure that your feet are not pointed inward or your knees will roll together as you lower your hips toward the ground, which can strain the inner knee structures.
- As you begin to flex your hips, knees, and ankles, shift your pelvis and knees back toward your heels as if you were lowering your buttocks onto a chair just beyond your reach.
- Keep your rib cage floating up and your chest and front shoulders open as you inhale. Gently draw your shoulder blades toward each other to keep your front shoulders and chest expanded.
- As you exhale, lower your hips farther. If you need to, reach your arms out in front of your body to keep your balance. Feel your abdominal muscles activate to aid in your balance.

- Move slowly and breathe deeply as you lower to a point where you are comfortable yet slightly challenged. Adjust your position according to what feels best for your body to maintain stability.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Press outward through your thighs to keep your knees from rolling toward each other. Anchor your energy down through your heels and do the best you can to sink your heels all the way to the ground.
- Stay in this position for a few breaths. Interlace your fingers and rest your forehead on your thumbs, or bring your hands together in Anjali Mudra (Prayer Pose). Soften your abdomen and relax your shoulders as you focus your breath into your back.
- If your knees begin to roll toward each other, gently press your elbows into your inner thighs to maintain alignment with your knees and feet. Keep your shoulders soft.
- To exit this position, lower your bottom onto the ground as slowly and gracefully as possible and prepare for the next asana.

ADJUSTMENTS

Heels—Many students have tight calf muscles, which causes them to lift the heels off the ground. The ideal solution is to place a towel or blanket under the heels for support and comfort; you can also simply roll up the back of a mat and place it under the heels. This is the most common adjustment needed for this posture.

Knees—A student's knees often roll in toward each other. When this happens, place the student's arms between the knees as a wedge to hold the knees out. Cue the student to check to ensure that the knees are pointed in the same direction as the toes.

Balance—Squat or kneel in front of the student, whichever is most comfortable for you. The two of you should hold onto each other's wrists. Take on some of the student's weight until she or he feels well balanced. Gently draw the student toward you so that the student's body weight does not sink back too far behind the heels.



Adjustment: heels.

MODIFICATIONS

Knee concerns—Use a bar, such as a ballet bar, if available, so that the student can hold onto it when squatting down, thus taking the body weight off of the knees. In addition, you can have the student sit on blocks or on the ground with bent knees. In this option, instruct the student to abduct the thighs and slightly round the torso while engaging the abdominal muscles.



Adjustment: balance.

Foot injury, very stiff ankles, weak knees, or hip replacement—The student can lie on the back with the knees pulled into the chest. The knees should be held apart wider than the shoulders for a restorative posture.

KINEMATICS

Although this posture's deep squat may seem completely contraindicated for those with a knee injury, it can be beneficial to some because of the stretching in both the thighs and the calves. Some causes of knee hyperextension may be helped by gently stretching overly tight calf muscles. This pose is a particularly beneficial posture for pregnant students because the squat opens and gently stretches the pelvis and perineum.

Malasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
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	Ankle dorsiflexion, stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus (E, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
	Ankle stability	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus, peroneals (I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Quadriceps (E, I)	Quadriceps
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, I)	Gluteus maximus, deep external rotators*
	Stability	Adductors, gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators* (I)	
Torso	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	Quadratus lumborum, erector spinae
Shoulder	Internal rotation	Latissimus dorsi, anterior deltoid, pectoralis major (C, I)	Rhomboids, trapezius
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, brachialis (C, I)	Triceps brachii
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (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)	
	Thumb abduction	Abductor pollicis longus and brevis, extensor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck flexion	Splenius capitis and cervicis, levator scapulae, cervical erector spinae, upper trapezius (E, R)	Splenius capitis and cervicis, levator scapulae, cervical erector spinae, upper trapezius

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

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



Dandasana

Staff Pose

[duhn-DAAH-suh-nuh]

Danda is Sanskrit for “staff” or “walking stick.” The pose name Dandasana describes the straightness and strength of the upper torso and back.

DESCRIPTION

In Dandasana, the spine and the lower body are straight and strong with the hips bent to 90 degrees. It is an active posture with the upper spine, lower abdominal, and thigh muscles all working to keep length in both the upper and lower body. This asana is generally the point from which many other seated postures build.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the backs of the heels.

BENEFITS

- Massages internal organs.
- Strengthens upper back.
- Strengthens and stretches abdominal muscles, lower back, and thighs.
- Can soothe heartburn.
- Helps build postural awareness.

⚠ CAUTION

Back pain—Students with acute back pain should practice with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- Sit on the ground with your legs stretched out in front of you. Keep your legs and feet as close together as is comfortable with your sit bones (ischial tuberosities) level on the ground. Place your hands down to either side of your hips with your fingers pointed forward toward your toes.
- Breathe in deeply as you lengthen your spine, lifting your rib cage from your pelvis. Draw your shoulder blades together slightly, and soften your shoulders away from your ears. Gaze softly forward beyond your toes.
- Roll your upper thighs toward each other slightly while keeping your toes pointed upward. Slide your kneecaps toward your hips by activating your quadriceps. Anchor into the back of your heels to keep them from lifting off the ground. Imagine your pelvis rooting into the ground and draw energy upward.
- Press down through your hands and sit bones to elongate the sides of your spine. Feel your shoulders softening away from your ears and the front of your shoulders rolling open away from your chest.

- With each exhalation, notice your ears aligned over your shoulders, and your shoulders aligned over your hips. With each inhalation, feel the crown of your head stretching upward toward the sky.
- Focus on your breath. Prepare for your next pose.

ADJUSTMENTS

Legs—Remind students to keep the toes pointed upward. Gently brush the outsides of the feet to cue students to press the feet closer together by activating the adductor and quadriceps muscles.

Spine and shoulders—Most students will not realize that the upper back is rounded. To adjust, kneel behind the student (watch your mechanics), and place your hands to the sides of the ribs and gently cue to lift the rib cage upward. You can also press your knee gently against the student's mid back to encourage more length in the spine. At the same time, place your hands on the fronts of the student's shoulders and gradually roll the upper arms back to open the chest and elongate the spine.

Head—Observe students to see if the chin is jutting forward. To adjust, place your hands lightly to the sides of the student's head and move the head back to align the ears directly over the shoulders. You can also place your hand lightly on top of a student's head and ask the student to press against your hand to lengthen the neck and spine.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hamstrings or weak upper spine—The most common adjustment for Dandasana is to place a folded blanket or towel under the student's pelvis. It is also acceptable to allow students to keep the knees flexed slightly as they work, over time, to stretch the hamstrings. Another modification is to place students with the hips and back against a wall, stick, or other sturdy linear object and instruct them to press the pelvis and upper back against the object to align the spine.

Tight shoulders—Invite the student to externally rotate the upper arms so that the fingers point backward instead of forward to open the shoulders more completely.



Modification: tight hamstrings or weak upper spine.

KINEMATICS

The common modification of placing a blanket, bolster, or folded towel under the student's hips helps alleviate strain in the low back by repositioning the tilt of the front pelvis slightly more forward, thus achieving a more natural alignment in the spine. This modification also helps alleviate the rounded back that occurs in those with very tight hamstrings. By allowing more concentrated flexion at the hip joint, the student strengthens the upper spine muscles while also aligning the shoulders directly over the hips. This modification is appropriate and quite beneficial as it provides a base of aligned posture with ease and stability in all of the other seated positions.

Dandasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion, stability	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	

(continued)

Dandasana (continued)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Torso	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk extension and stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi (I)	
Shoulder	Scapular adduction, stability	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	Postural support 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)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus
	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi ulnaris, radialis longus and brevis, extensor digitorum (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, cervical erector spinae, upper trapezius (I)	

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

Janu Shirshasana



Head-to-Knee Pose

[JAAH-noo sheer-SHAAH-suh-nuh]

Janu is Sanskrit for “knee,” and *shirsha* means “head.”

DESCRIPTION

In this seated forward bend, one leg is stretched forward in front of the body, and the knee of the opposite leg is flexed and lowered laterally to the ground. This posture is broken down into two parts, the first of which concentrates on lengthening both the upper and lower halves of the body. In the second, or resting, phase of the pose, the head rests close to the knee. In some variations of Janu Shirshasana, the foot of the bent knee is flexed and rotated with the toes pointing toward the ground. In other variations, the ankle of the bent leg is crossed into Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus).



ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the heel of the straight leg.

BENEFITS

- Stretches and strengthens the spine.
- Stretches the hamstrings and groin.
- Calms the nervous system and helps relieve mild depression.
- Improves digestion.
- May alleviate symptoms of menstrual discomfort or menopause.
- Can reduce anxiety, fatigue, and headache.
- Relieves symptoms of high blood pressure, insomnia, and sinusitis.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Acute knee or back pain—Practice with modifications.

Intestinal discomfort—Due to the pressure created in the abdomen, those with intestinal discomfort should refrain from practicing this pose until the discomfort passes.

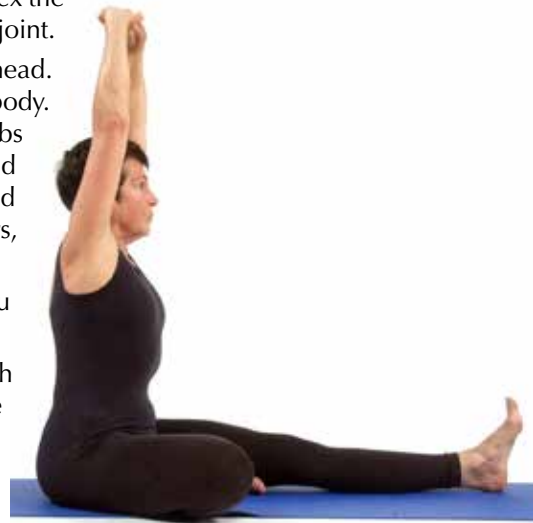
VERBAL CUES

Phase One

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), anchor through your left leg. Bend your right knee and draw your thigh toward your chest while pointing your sit bones slightly toward the back edge of your mat. Keep your hips as squared as possible as you rotate your right leg out, lowering the outer leg toward the ground.
- As your right thigh lowers to the ground, picture the top of that thigh as a bottle top opening. As your right thigh rotates out (externally), the twisting action helps free the hip joint, thus opening space and releasing tension. The

more the hip opens, the less stress is placed on the knee. Dorsiflex the foot, so that the toes point toward the knee and help stabilize the joint.

- Interlace your fingers, and, as you inhale, raise your arms overhead. Pronate your forearms to rotate your palms away from your body. Extend your arms as straight as is comfortable, pressing your thumbs toward the sky and pointing your pinky fingers toward the ground behind you to more fully engage your posterior shoulder and upper back muscles. Relax your shoulders away from your ears, opening space in the sides of your neck.
- Exhale and turn your torso slightly toward the left so that you align your spine with your straight left leg.
- Inhale and lengthen your spine as you begin to feel taller through your torso. Feel your rib cage lift out of your low back. Gaze forward beyond your toes.
- Exhale and slowly fold forward from your hips, like a hinge. Stop at the first sign of resistance and breathe into that space. Fold only as far as you can comfortably go without rounding your spine, then place your hands on the ground to either side of your left leg.
- Maintain all of the length and extension in your spine and reach your hands toward your left foot. Hold on wherever you can reach comfortably with your hands or with the use of a strap.
- Continue to focus on your breath.



Phase one.

Phase Two

- On the next inhalation, arch your mid back slightly, lift your chest, and imagine your navel reaching toward the sky.
- Exhale and fold your torso forward from the bottom to the top, draping your upper body over the front of your left leg. With each exhalation, let your neck relax as your head lowers toward your knee. Allow your right rib cage to relax toward your left leg.
- Soften your abdomen. Visualize your breath moving into your back and imagine that energy opening space between your ribs and between your vertebrae. Focus your breath on any place where you feel tension or resistance.
- To exit the pose, bring your hands to the ground beside your hips. Inhale and press through your arms to raise your torso. Exhale and stretch your right leg out, and prepare for the opposite side.



Moving into phase two.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—If the student's bent-leg ankle feels uncomfortable, adjust by either increasing the angle of the knee or placing some light padding under the ankle.

Knee—If the student's bent knee is off the ground, you can offer support with a folded blanket or adjust for hip and back tightness (explained next).

Hips—If the student's hips are not square in relation to the outstretched leg, use your hands to gently draw the hips back; alternatively, cue the student to move the hips in a manner such that the hip of the straight leg moves back a little. You also can press the other hip (of the bent-knee leg) slightly forward at the same time. Note: The forward bend should come from the hips; otherwise, the back tends to round, especially in the low spine.

Torso—The back should be aligned toward the extended foot. Kneel slightly behind the student, place your hands on the student's outer rib cage, and encourage the student to lift the rib cage out of the low spine as much as possible. Additionally, when kneeling behind the student, place one of your hands at the top of the pelvis and your other hand on the student's shoulder in a way that helps relax the shoulders down and open. As you guide the student's torso forward and up, you also guide the shoulders down. These two actions together should begin to straighten the back and open the chest.

Head—In the resting phase of this asana, the neck and head should relax. If the student's neck is holding any tension, brush your fingers against or lightly tap the neck or head to release.



Adjustment: torso.

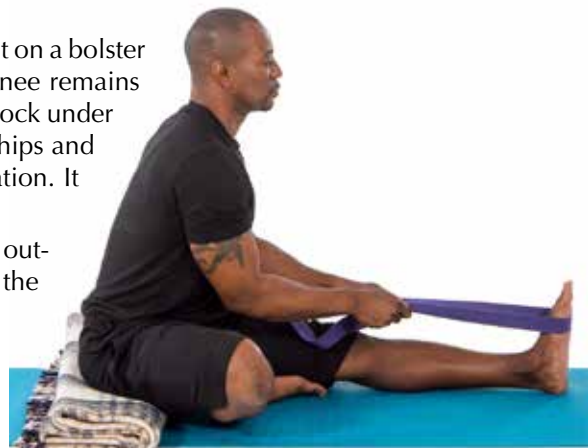
Arms—The arms and hands can be held in many ways in this pose. As long as the student's shoulders remain relaxed and away from the ears, various options for hand positioning can be explored without detracting from the pose's general benefits. If a student has enough flexibility to reach the hands to the foot, then the arms can be either active or passive. If the student is flexible enough to reach beyond the foot, then the student may apply a grip with one hand holding the opposite wrist.

MODIFICATIONS

Raised bent knee, rounded back and shoulders—Seat the student on a bolster or blanket to lift the hips higher than the knees. If the bent knee remains lifted higher than the hips, place a bolster, folded blanket, or block under the upper thigh for support. This modification helps open the hips and takes effort off of the low back, thus allowing for more relaxation. It also allows for a straighter upper spine.

Tight hips or hamstrings—Provide a strap to wrap around the outstretched foot if the student cannot reach it without rounding the spine.

Pregnancy or otherwise large belly—To comfortably accommodate a larger belly in this forward fold, invite the student to widen the straight leg slightly before folding. This modification may also be used to open more space in the low back of the bent-leg side.



Modification: tight hips or hamstrings.

KINEMATICS

This posture uses the concentric contraction of the quadriceps to help release the hamstrings and hip rotators as the torso folds over the outstretched leg. As the student continues to lengthen the torso out over the straight leg, the adductors of the bent leg are stretched. In the torso, the scapulae (shoulder blades) are drawn slightly together and toward the hips by the concentric contraction of the rhomboids and trapezius muscles between the scapulae, which help keep the torso long throughout the posture.

The torso should be elongated as much as possible, especially during the first phase of the pose. If a student's upper back is rounded, then it is important to help the student lift the front ribs and open the chest.

Janu Shirshasana (Left Leg Extended)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus, tibialis anterior (C, I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings, sartorius (C, I)	Adductors, gracilis
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings, adductors
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	Adductors
	Initial hip external rotation	Adductors (E, R)	
	Hip abduction and external rotation	Gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators*	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Initial hip flexion (forward bend)	Hamstrings (E)	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus, deep external rotators
	Hip flexion over 120 degrees	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	
Torso	Spinal extension with forward flexion	Erector spinae (C, E, I)	Quadratus lumborum, latissimus dorsi
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis (I)	
Shoulder	Humeral flexion	Anterior deltoids, biceps brachii, coracobrachialis, pectoralis major (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction, stability	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Scapular stability	Serratus anterior (I)	
	Postural support in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	External rotation	Infraspinatus and teres minor with some posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, brachialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digitorum profundus and superficialis, flexor digiti minimi, interossei palmaris (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis, 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 (in the body segment column) or relaxed (in the muscles active column).

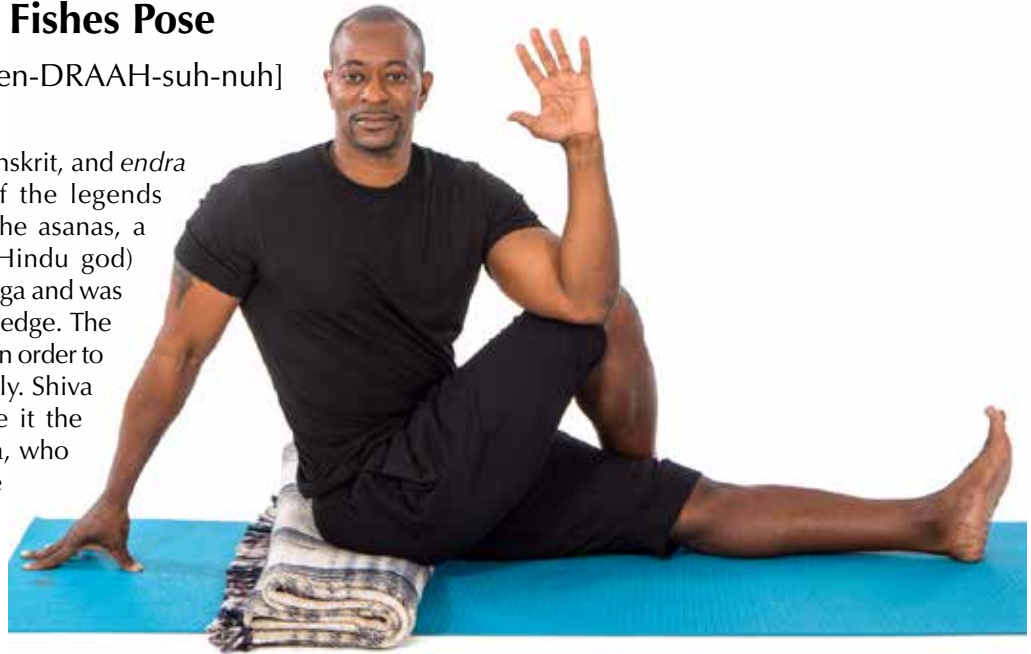
Ardha Matsyendrasana



Half Lord of the Fishes Pose

[AR-dhuh muht-see-yen-DRAAH-suh-nuh]

Matsya means “fish” in Sanskrit, and *endra* means “ruler.” In one of the legends explaining the origin of the asanas, a fish overheard Shiva (a Hindu god) explaining the secrets of yoga and was fascinated with the knowledge. The fish began to twist its body in order to hear the words more clearly. Shiva noticed the fish and gave it the divine form of Matsyendra, who then spread the knowledge of yoga throughout the land. This twisting asana is the foundation of all the seated twists.



DESCRIPTION

Ardha Matsyendrasana is a seated twist in which one leg is straight out in front of the body and the other leg is bent and usually crossed over the straight leg near the opposite hip. The upper torso is rotated in the direction of the bent leg.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the heel of the flexed leg and the back of the heel of the straight leg.

BENEFITS

- Increases energy level.
- Stimulates and massages the internal organs, specifically the kidneys and liver.
- Stimulates digestion.
- Aligns the spine.
- Builds the trunk muscles.
- Opens the shoulders and chest.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Migraine or cold symptoms—Students with migraine headache or severe cold symptoms should replace this posture with a gentle, restorative supine twist.

Hip replacement—Students with a hip replacement should not cross the foot of the bent knee over the straight leg.

Acute back injury—Students suffering from a back concern should either proceed with caution or skip this pose.

Pregnancy—Pregnant students should rotate only through the upper spine if they are beyond the first trimester.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale and lengthen your spine. Exhale and pull your right thigh to your chest. Cross your right foot to the outside of your left leg as close to your left hip as is comfortable. Press firmly into the ball of your left foot. You will feel a slight rotation of your pelvis where your left hip moves slightly forward of your right.
- Inhale and raise your right arm overhead to lift your rib cage. On an exhalation, slowly rotate your rib cage and belly toward the right. Stop when you can no longer move without assistance from your arms.
- Inhale and feel your rib cage lift away from your hips. Lower your right arm and place your hand on the ground as close to your sacrum as possible. Externally rotate your right shoulder so that your fingers point away from your body. Breathe deeply into the open space of your right chest, and feel your chest rotate slightly more to the right.
- Place your left arm wherever it feels most comfortably challenging—hugging your right rib cage, wrapped around your right knee, or with the back of your elbow to the outside of your right thigh. Use this connection for stabilizing the twist. Remain mindful to keep the line of your spine perpendicular to the ground. Soften into the twisting action through your thoracic spine.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Inhale and lengthen your spine, imagining more space opening up between the vertebrae. As you exhale, turn your head to look over your right shoulder. Rotate your rib cage as much as you comfortably can so that your right shoulder points as far back from the front of your body as is comfortable. Tuck your chin toward your right shoulder to encourage a deeper stretch on the left side of your neck.
- To exit this posture, inhale and slowly turn your head and chest forward. Place your hands to your sides and extend your right leg out. Prepare for the next side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Legs and hips—Make sure the student's outstretched leg is extended but comfortable and that the hip of the bent knee remains on the ground. If it lifts off the ground, either instruct the student to root through the sit bones or place the student on a bolster or blanket.

Spine—If the spine rounds, kneel behind the student and gently press against the middle spine with your hands or knee. Cue the student to lift the chest and lengthen the spine, moving it away from your support.

Shoulders—Cue the student to relax the shoulders away from the ears by placing your hands gently on top of the shoulders. Also, remind the student to reach the crown of the head upward.

Rotation—For students with a limited spinal range of motion or with shoulder concerns, instruct them to keep the elbow of the front hand straight and to place the other hand to the side, wherever it is comfortably challenged. To adjust, kneel behind the student and place one hand on the front of the shoulder to the side where the student is rotating. Place your other hand on the student's rib cage on the opposite side. Gently move the student's rib cage forward, away from you, while rotating the shoulder around a little farther, thus creating more spinal rotation.

Hand position—Encourage the student to keep the back arm as straight and as close to the spine as possible. This position depends on the length of the student's arm and the width of the shoulders. In all cases, the shoulders should remain relaxed.



Adjustment: spine; shoulders.

Finger position—Instruct the student to rotate the back arm externally so that the fingers point away from the spine. Kneeling behind the student, place one hand on the student's extended upper arm and rotate the shoulder externally. At the same time, place your other hand on the student's opposite shoulder to create length through the front of the chest.

MODIFICATIONS

Low-back weakness or hip or hamstring tightness—Place a folded blanket under the student's hips to help align the pelvis.

Hip replacement or larger belly—Instruct the student not to cross the bent knee over the opposite leg but instead to keep it aligned with the same-side hip by placing the foot of the bent leg against the inside of the straight leg.



Adjustment: rotation.

KINEMATICS

Ardha Matsyendrasana focuses on toning the abdominal and spinal muscles and creating a gentle stretch in the deep external hip rotators and the shoulders. Having both legs grounded helps create more length in the torso, as does the grounding of the arm that rotates behind the body. The twist is initiated in the lower thoracic region and, depending on a person's spinal flexibility, continues up through the spine into the cervical spine (neck). The firmness of the abdominal muscles also helps keep the torso lifted and stable.

Ardha Matsyendrasana (Rotating to the Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings, sartorius (C, I)	
	Thigh adduction	Adductors, gracilis, pectineus (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	Tensor fascia lata, deep external rotators,* gluteus medius
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	
Torso (R and L)	Trunk stability	Erector spinae, transverse abdominis, rectus abdominis (C, I)	
	Chest and rib elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Torso (R)	Rotation to right	Internal obliques, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	Erector spinae (L), external obliques
Torso (L)	Rotation to right	External obliques (C, I)	Quadratus lumborum, serratus anterior, internal oblique

(continued)

Ardha Matsyendrasana (Rotating to the Right) *(continued)*

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Shoulder (R and L)	External rotation	Posterior deltoid, teres minor, infraspinatus (C, I)	
Shoulder (R)	Humeral hyperextension, stability	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid, teres major (C, I)	Anterior deltoid, pectoralis major
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, trapezius (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Humeral extension, leverage against right knee	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid, teres major (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid, teres major, rhomboids, mid trapezius
Upper arm (R)	Forearm extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Upper arm (L)	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Lower arm (R)	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Lower arm (L)	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R)	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis, flexor carpi ulnaris, flexor digitorum superficialis, palmaris longus
Hand and fingers (L)	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor carpi ulnaris (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 (R and L)	Neck extension, stability	Cervical erector spinae, splenius capitis and cervicis, semispinalis (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Head rotation to right	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals (C, I)	Sternocleidomastoid
Neck (L)	Head rotation to right	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I)	Upper trapezius, splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals

*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.

Marichyasana A



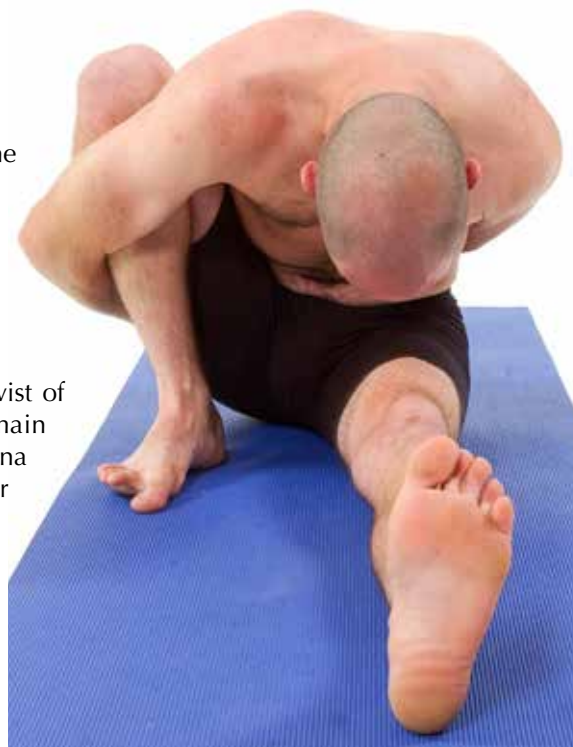
Marichi's Pose, Variation A

[mar-EE-chee-YAHH-suh-nuh kuh]

Marichi is the name of a great sage in Hindu mythology, and the word can be translated as “the way of light.” The Marichyasana variations are symbolically and energetically powerful, as Marichi himself is said to be. This is the first of four Marichyasana poses.

DESCRIPTION

Marichyasana and its variations are extensions of the spinal twist of Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose). The main difference between the two postures is that in the Marichyasana variations the arms are bound around the body to create a deeper stretch into the joints. Marichyasana has four commonly practiced variations—A, B, C, and D. In variation A, the bent leg does not cross the opposite leg, and the arms wrap behind the back as the torso moves into a forward bend.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the heel of the flexed leg and the back of the heel of the straight leg.

BENEFITS

- Increases energy level.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Brings the spine into alignment.
- Builds strength in the trunk muscles.
- Strengthens the hip and shoulder joints.
- Increases circulation in the joints.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Pregnancy—After the first trimester, pregnant students should avoid doing this posture due to the compression of the abdomen.

Spine concerns—Those with a spine injury should practice with modifications or skip this pose.

Shoulder injury—Proceed with caution and modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale to lengthen your spine. As you exhale, bend your right knee and draw your thigh to your chest. Place your heel as close to your pelvis as possible. Imagine your left leg as an anchor, keeping the thigh muscles activated.
- Inhale and raise your right arm overhead. Exhale and bring the outside of your right upper arm to the inside of your right leg. Exhale and fold from the hips, imagining someone gently pulling your right hand forward so that your right shoulder reaches beyond your right shin.
- Rotate your chest and belly slightly to the left. Bend your right elbow and press against your shin with your upper arm. Inhale and lift your rib cage away from your hips.
- Internally rotate your right arm so that your thumb points downward. Bend your elbow and reach your hand around the outside of your right leg toward your spine. Press your upper arm against your shin to help lift your chest, moving it forward toward your right foot.
- Bring your left arm behind your back, with the palm facing out and reach toward your right hand. Grasp your left wrist with your right hand. Inhale and lengthen your spine, arching back slightly to lift your chest and open your abdominal region.
- Exhale and fold forward from your hips while you stretch your chest toward your left knee. Relax your spine and neck. Release your muscles with each exhalation.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this position, exhale and release your arms slowly. Bring your hands by your hips and inhale as you lift your chest upright. Straighten your right leg and prepare for the other side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Extended leg—If the student's extended leg is rotated externally, this generally means that the leg is relaxed. Brush the outside of the foot to cue the student to activate the leg throughout the posture, with the toes and knee pointing up, and remind the student to anchor through that leg.

Bent leg—Sometimes a student needs to take the knee wider than hip-width apart to accommodate the rib cage rotation. However, instruct the student to align the knee with the hip as much as possible to make it easier to wrap the arm around the leg. Gently press the outside of your shin against the student's outer thigh to bring the leg into alignment.

Shoulders—Kneel behind the student and place one hand on the upper arm on the side toward which the student is rotating. Gently guide the shoulder into greater external rotation. At the same time, place your opposite hand on the lower back ribs, near the kidneys, and gently press forward and up. This adjustment creates length as well as rotation in the torso.

Hands—If the student's hands are nearly but not quite touching behind the body, ask the student to relax and breathe deeply. Kneel behind the student and place a hand on each of the student's upper arms. As the student exhales, slowly press the arms closer together to draw the fingertips nearer. The student also can bend farther forward to help shorten the space between the thigh and the rib cage. Have the student stay in this position for only a few breaths until more strength and flexibility are gained.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hips—If the hip of the bent leg is lifted off the ground, place a rolled-up blanket or towel under the student's opposite hip and remind the student to root the hips into the ground.

Tight shoulders—Instruct the student to hold the ends of a strap between both hands in order to allow the student to hold the arms in a static position and deepen the stretch.

KINEMATICS

Because of the deep shoulder stretch, students new to this pose may feel like the circulation is being cut off when they bind the arms. After some practice, the muscles relax and the joints loosen and students gain more range in the joint to allow the posture to be comfortable for a longer time.

Marichyasana A (Right Knee Bent)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, sartorius, left rectus femoris (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 (I)	
	Chest and rib elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder	Hyperextension, adduction of humerus	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid (C, I)	Pectoralis major and minor, anterior deltoid
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm (R)	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Upper arm (L)	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis, triceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei dorsales manus and palmaris, opponens digiti minimi, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck	Head extension or slight hyperextension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae, semispinalis, upper trapezius (I)	Sternocleidomastoid

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



Marichyasana B

Marichi's Pose, Variation B

[mar-EE-chee-YAHH-suh-nuh k-huh]

This asana is the second of the four Marichyasana variations.

DESCRIPTION

This variation of Marichyasana is similar to variation A, except that instead of the leg being extended in front of the body, the knee is flexed and the ankle is placed in Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus).

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into both feet and the externally rotated knee.

BENEFITS

- Increases energy level.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Aligns the spine.
- Builds strength in the trunk muscles.
- Deeply strengthens the hip and shoulder joints.
- Increases circulation in the joints.
- Relieves stiffness in the hips, knees, and ankles.
- Strengthens the low spine and abdominal muscles.



⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee injuries—Students should be extremely mindful of the knee in Ardha Padmasana whether they have a knee injury or not. If it is difficult to rotate the leg externally because the hips are tight, the knees take on the strain in order to compensate.

Pregnancy—Due to the compression into the abdomen, women in the second or third trimester of pregnancy should not practice this posture.

Shoulder injury—Those with a shoulder injury should proceed with caution and modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale to lengthen the spine. On the next inhalation, bend your left knee and externally rotate the leg so the knee lowers toward the ground. Exhale and bring your left ankle to the crease of your right hip, into Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus Pose). Please see modifications for Ardha Padmasana for students who cannot accommodate this positioning comfortably.

- With your next exhalation, bend the right knee and bring the thigh toward the chest. Dorsiflex the left foot so the top of the foot and toes press into the outside of the right thigh. This helps secure the foot in position.
- Inhale and raise your right arm overhead. Exhale and lower your right arm to the inside of your right leg. Exhale, folding from your hips and imagine someone gently pulling your right hand forward so that your right shoulder reaches beyond your right shin.
- Rotate your chest slightly to the left. Bend your right elbow and press against the shin with your upper arm as you lift your rib cage away from your hips.
- Internally rotate your right arm so that your thumb points downward. Bend the elbow and reach your hand around the outside of your right leg toward your spine.
- Bring your left arm behind your back, with the palm facing out, and reach toward the right hand. Clasp the left wrist with the right hand. Inhale and lengthen the spine, arching back slightly to lift the chest.
- Exhale and fold forward from the hips, pressing your chest toward your left knee. Relax your spine and neck. Release your muscles with each exhalation.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this position, exhale and release the arms slowly. Bring the hands by your hips and inhale as you lift your chest upright. Uncross your left leg and straighten both legs back into Dandasana. Prepare for the opposite side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Leg positioning—Use the adjustments for Ardha Padmasana to help the student into the most appropriate positioning, as some students are unable to sit in the full expression of the pose without lifting one side of the pelvis off the ground. You may also simply cue the student to place the left foot under the right thigh, near the hip.

Feet—The foot in Ardha Padmasana should not be overstretched on the outside of the ankle. Remind the student to keep the foot dorsiflexed and active.

Hips—If student's hips are not level, kneel behind the student with your hands lightly touching the hips. Press downward gently and draw back slightly on the side that is not in Ardha Padmasana.

Bent leg—Sometimes a student will need to take the knee wider than hip width to accommodate the rib cage rotation. As in Variation A, encourage the student to align the knee with the hip as much as possible to make it easier to wrap the arm around the leg. Gently press against the student's outer thigh to bring the leg into alignment.

Hands—If the hands are almost touching, remind the student to relax and breathe deeply. The student can bend farther forward to help shorten the space between the thigh and rib cage. Invite the student to stay in this position for only a few breaths until the student gains more strength and flexibility.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hip in Ardha Padmasana—If the student is unable to sit in Ardha Padmasana, instruct the student to keep the bent leg on the ground as in Janu Shirshasana (Head to Knee Pose). Place a blanket or bolster under the bent knee to relax the leg in either position.

Tight shoulders—Instruct the student to hold the ends of a strap between both hands to allow for holding the arms in a static position while deepening the stretch in the shoulders.

KINEMATICS

Because the foot of the leg in Ardha Padmasana is wedged against the opposite thigh and abdomen, it makes it somewhat easier to hold the leg in position for those working on the external rotation in Padmasana (Lotus Pose). Tight shoulder adjustments are the same as in Variation A.

Marichyasana B (Right Knee Bent, Left Leg in Ardha Padmasana)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (R)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (R)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	Adductors
	Hip external rotation	Adductors, sartorius (E, R)	
	External rotation, stability	Gluteus medius and minimus, deep external rotators* (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)	
	Chest and rib elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Shoulder	Hyperextension, adduction of humerus	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid (C, I)	Pectoralis major and minor, anterior deltoid
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm (R)	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Upper arm (L)	Elbow flexion	Triceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei dorsales manus and palmaris, opponens digiti minimi, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck	Head extension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae, semispinalis, upper trapezius (I)	Sternocleidomastoid

*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 = relaxed (in body segment column) or right (in muscles active column).

Marichyasana C



Marichi's Pose, Variation C

[mar-EE-chee-YAHH-suh-nuh, guh]

This is the third of the four Marichyasana variations.

DESCRIPTION

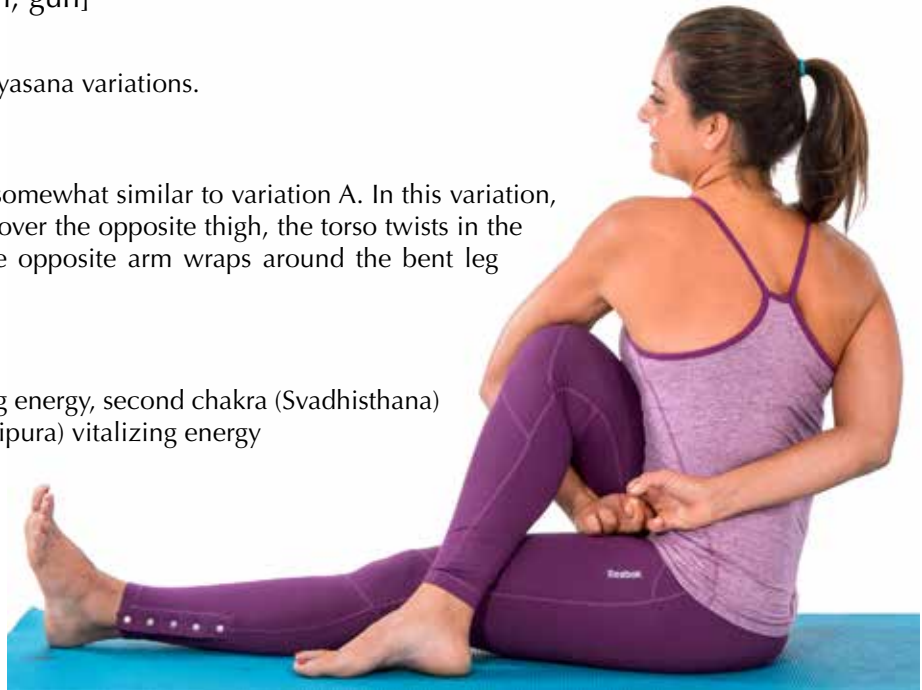
This variation of Marichyasana is somewhat similar to variation A. In this variation, the foot of the bent leg is crossed over the opposite thigh, the torso twists in the direction of the bent leg, and the opposite arm wraps around the bent leg binding behind the back.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the heel of the flexed leg and the back of the heel of the straight leg.



BENEFITS

- Increases energy level.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Aligns the spine.
- Builds strength in the trunk muscles.
- Deeply strengthens the hip and shoulder joints.
- Increases circulation in the joints.
- Increases focus.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Pregnancy—Due to the compression in the abdomen, women in the second or third trimester of pregnancy should not practice this posture.

Shoulder injury—Those with a shoulder injury should proceed with caution and modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale to lengthen your spine. Exhale and bend your right knee, bringing your thigh to your chest. Cross your right foot over your left thigh and place the foot on the ground wherever it feels most comfortable.
- Inhale and rotate your rib cage to the right. Turn your head to look over your right shoulder as far as is comfortable. Imagine your left leg as an anchor, keeping the thigh muscles activated. Place your right hand on the ground for support.

- On your next exhalation, continue to keep your torso rotated to the right and reach your left arm across your body to the outside of your right leg. Move your left shoulder blade toward the outside of your right knee as you turn your torso a bit more to the right, if comfortable.
- Bend your left elbow and press your upper arm against the outside of your right knee as you lift your rib cage away from your hips.
- Internally rotate your left arm so that your thumb points toward the ground, then wrap your arm around the front of your right leg. Reach the hand around, toward your right hand, and bind your hands together, if comfortable.
- Inhale, lengthening your spine, and open as much space between your lower ribs and pelvis as possible. Continue to press the back of your left upper arm against your right leg for leverage.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this position, exhale and release your arms slowly. Rotate your chest forward and bring your hands by your hips. Uncross your left leg and straighten both legs back into Dandasana. Prepare for the opposite side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Extended leg—If the student's extended leg is rotated externally, this generally means that the leg is relaxed. Brush the outside of the foot to cue the student to activate the leg throughout the posture with the toes and knee pointing up; remind the student to anchor through that leg.

Hips—If the student's hips are not level and touching the ground, kneel behind the student with your hands lightly touching the student's hips and press downward to ground the pelvis.

Torso—Kneel behind the student, and place your hand on the student's same-side shoulder. Pull back gently as you use your opposite hand to press forward and up on the student's rib cage, thus creating more spinal rotation.

Hands—If the student's hands are almost touching and have enough range of motion, encourage the student to relax and breathe deeply, drawing the hands closer together on an exhalation. You may aid in drawing the hands closer by kneeling behind the student and grasping the upper arms. As the student exhales, press the arms toward each other and draw the hands closer together, as far as is comfortable.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hips—If the hip of the bent leg lifts off the ground, place a rolled-up blanket or bolster under the opposite hip, or both hips if necessary, to balance the pelvis.

Tight shoulders—Invite the student to hold the ends of a strap between the hands behind the back. This modification allows the student to hold the arms in a static position to deepen the stretch without straining the shoulder joints.

Shoulder injury or tight chest—Instead of asking the student to bind the arms behind the back, invite the student to place the back arm against the spine and press the back of the opposite arm into the bent knee. You can also have the student practice Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose) instead.

KINEMATICS

The pressure of the bent arm against the opposite thigh aids in gaining leverage to rotate the torso more fully.

Marichyasana C (Right Knee Bent, Rotation to Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (I)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)	
Thigh (R)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, sartorius (C, I)	Gluteus maximus
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris, sartorius (C, I)	Hamstrings
Torso (R and L)	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
Torso (R)	Rotation to right	Internal obliques, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	External oblique
Torso (L)	Rotation to right	External oblique (C, I)	Internal oblique, quadratus lumborum
Shoulder (R)	Humerus hyperextension and adduction	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid (C, I)	Pectoralis major and minor, anterior deltoid
	External rotation	Posterior deltoid, infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Internal rotation	Pectoralis major, anterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Humerus hyperextension	Latissimus dorsi, teres major (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm (R and L)	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Lower arm (R and L)	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei dorsales manus and palmaris, opponens digiti minimi, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Head rotation to right, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae (C, I)	Sternocleidomastoid
Neck (L)	Head rotation	Sternocleidomastoid (C, I)	

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



Marichyasana D

Marichi's Pose, Variation D

[mar-EE-chee-YAHH-suh-nuh g-huh]

This is the fourth of the four Marichyasana variations.

DESCRIPTION

This variation of Marichyasana is a combination of the Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus) element of variation B and the twisting of variation C. It is by far the most technically challenging variation; in fact, many people describe this combination of hip opening, spinal twisting, and arm binding as a “pretzel” pose.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into both feet and the externally rotated knee.

BENEFITS

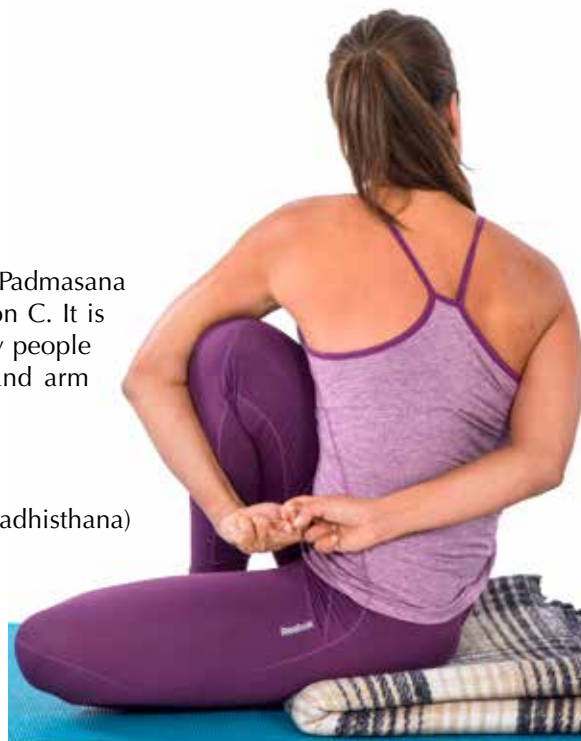
- Increases energy level.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Brings the spine into alignment.
- Builds strength in the trunk muscles.
- Opens the shoulder joints.
- Deeply strengthens the hip and shoulder joints.
- Increases circulation in the joints.
- Increases focus.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee injuries—Students should be extremely mindful of the knee in Ardha Padmasana, whether or not they have a knee injury. If it is difficult to rotate the leg externally because the hips are tight, the knees take on the strain in order to compensate. Modifications should be used.

Pregnancy—Due to compression in the abdomen, women in the second or third trimester of pregnancy should not practice this posture.

Shoulder injury—Students with extreme shoulder tightness or injury should practice with caution and modifications.



VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale to lengthen the spine, creating as much space between the ribs and hips as possible. Keep the hips level and on the ground.
- On the next inhalation, bend your left knee and externally rotate the leg so that the knee lowers toward the ground. Exhale and bring your left ankle to the crease of your right hip into Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus Pose). (Please see the modifications for Ardha Padmasana for students who cannot accommodate this positioning comfortably, or simply place the left foot under the right thigh as close to the hip as possible.)
- With your next exhalation, bend your right knee to your chest. Dorsiflex your left foot so that the tops of the foot and toes press into the outside of your right thigh to keep the foot in position.
- Breathing in, place your right arm behind your spine for leverage. Bring the back of your left arm across to the outside of your right knee. Reach as far as you can, using the energy of your right arm to lift your spine.
- Reach your right hand behind your back toward your left hip. Internally rotate your left arm so that your thumb points toward the ground, then wrap your arm around the front of your right leg. Reach your left hand toward your right hand.
- As you exhale, rotate your right shoulder and rib cage back as far as is comfortable and press your left rib cage forward toward the outer edge of your right knee. Press the back of your left upper arm against your right thigh for leverage. Bind your hands together, if comfortable.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this position, exhale and release your arms slowly. Bring your hands beside your hips and inhale as you lift your chest upright. Uncross your left leg and straighten both legs back into Dandasana. Prepare for the opposite side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Ardha Padmasana positioning—Please refer to the modification instructions for Padmasana in chapter 8 to help the student into the most appropriate positioning. The foot in Ardha Padmasana should not be overstretched on the outside of the ankle.

Hips—If the hips are not level, kneel behind the student with your hands lightly touching the outer pelvis. Press down gently and pull back on the hip that is not in Ardha Padmasana.

Bent leg—Sometimes a student needs to take the knee wider than hip-width apart to accommodate the rib cage rotation. However, instruct the student to align the knee with the hip in order to make it easier to wrap the arm around the leg. Gently press against the student's outer thigh with the outside of your calf to coax the leg into alignment.

Hands—If the student's hands are almost touching, encourage the student to relax and breathe deeply. The student can bend farther forward to help shorten the space between the thigh and rib cage. Have the student stay in this position for only a few breaths until the student gains more strength and flexibility.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hip in Ardha Padmasana—If the student is unable to sit in Ardha Padmasana, suggest that the student keep the bent leg on the ground. Place a blanket under the bent knee for support to relax the leg in either position.

Tight shoulders—Cue the student to hold the ends of a strap between the hands. This modification allows the person to hold the arms in a static position to deepen the stretch.

Inability to bind arms—Instead of binding with the initial balancing arm, suggest that the student keep the hand on the ground behind the spine and place the outside of the opposite arm against the outside of the bent knee. You can also instruct the student to bind by twisting the torso in the opposite direction.

Balance concerns—If the student has extreme difficulty attaining this posture without strain, or cannot maintain positioning and stay balanced, it is best to substitute another posture.

KINEMATICS

The Ardha Padmasana positioning of the leg in this posture is likely to require modification for many students. As always, students should refrain from forcing the legs or arms into this position if they experience any discomfort.

Marichyasana D (Right Knee Flexed, Left Leg in Ardha Padmasana, Torso Rotated to Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C)	
Lower leg (L)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R and L)	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, sartorius (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	Adductors
	Hip external rotation	Adductors, sartorius (E)	
	External rotation, stability	Gluteus medius, deep external rotators* (C, I)	
Torso (R and L)	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	
Torso (R)	Rotation to right	Internal obliques, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	External obliques
Torso (L)	Rotation to right	External obliques, internal oblique, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (C, I)	
Shoulder (R)	Humerus hyperextension and adduction	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoid (C, I)	Pectoralis major, anterior deltoid
	External rotation	Posterior deltoid, infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Internal rotation	Pectoralis major, anterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Humerus hyperextension	Latissimus dorsi (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (C, I)	
	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
Lower arm	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris, extensor digitorum (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei dorsales manus and palmaris, opponens digiti minimi, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Head rotation to right, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae (C, I)	Sternocleidomastoid
Neck (L)	Head rotation	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.

Paschimottanasana



Seated Forward Bend, or Intense West-Side Stretch

[puhsh-chee-moht-tuhn-AHH-suh-nuh]

Paschima means “west” in Sanskrit, and *uttana* means “intense stretch.” Traditionally, it is considered ideal to face east for meditation and practice; therefore, the east side of the body is viewed as the front, whereas the west side is viewed as the back. Literally translated, then, *paschimottanasana* means “intense stretch of the west”—or, in this case, of the back side of the body.



DESCRIPTION

This is a seated, full forward bend. The legs are outstretched in front of the body, and the torso is folded forward at the hips and, to the best of the student’s ability, resting on the front of the legs.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the backs of the heels.

BENEFITS

- Calms and soothes the nervous system.
- Stretches the hamstrings and the entire back, both in the passive and the active variations.
- Stimulates circulation to the liver, kidneys, and reproductive organs.
- Improves digestion.
- Can relieve some symptoms of menstrual discomfort and menopause.
- May alleviate headache, anxiety, and fatigue.
- Can help relieve high blood pressure, infertility, insomnia, and sinusitis.

⚠ CAUTION

Back injury—Perform this pose with the back straight and little or no forward bend. Until the student is strong enough to release the spine while sitting, the pose should be practiced with modification or replaced by a different pose.

Intestinal discomfort—Due to the pressure created in the abdomen, students with intestinal discomfort should refrain from practicing this pose until the discomfort passes.

VERBAL CUES

Active

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale and sit tall. Roll your upper legs toward each other slightly and reach your sit bones back so that your pelvis tilts slightly forward. Inhale and raise both arms overhead.
- Expand the space between your front hip points (anterior superior iliac spines) and your navel. Exhale and begin to flex at your hips, like a hinge. Fold forward only as much as is comfortable without rounding your upper back. Stop at the first sign of resistance or tightness and soften into that space.
- Place your hands on the ground beside your hips and use your arms to help lengthen your spine. Keep your ears aligned with the top of your shoulders.
- Gently reach your hands toward your feet and hold wherever you comfortably can while maintaining an elongated back.
- Inhale, lift, and open your chest, arching back slightly. Roll your upper arms out, imagining your collarbones expanding away from each other, and continue to lengthen the front of your torso. Move your ribs forward and up slightly, and soften your shoulders away from your ears. Maintain length in your throat and the back of your neck.

Resting

- Exhale and slowly roll down your spine from the bottom to the top, relaxing your torso over your legs.
- Soften your abdomen and find your breath moving into the back of your body. Relax your shoulders away from your ears and keep your neck soft. Visualize your body sinking into the earth.
- Imagine your breath moving into any place that is resistant or holding tension and release that area completely. Soften the back of your neck to feel more lengthening between your shoulder blades.
- To exit this position, place your hands on the ground beside your hips. Inhale and press down through your hands as you slowly lift your torso and head.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—The student's feet are generally not of much concern in this pose; however, if the student can reach the hands beyond the feet, then you can help the person deepen the posture. Instruct the student to bring the feet together and draw the toes toward the head. You can assist by gently pressing up against the bottom of the toes.

Legs—If the student's knees are bent, check for proper back alignment and support. It is better to have the student back off, focus on the legs, and sit more upright than to let the student struggle with tight hamstrings. Note: If the student has finished with the active phase of the posture and is resting, he or she may bend the knees slightly as a modification, as long as the body remains relaxed. Instruct the student to bring the legs as close together as is comfortable.

Hips—If tight hamstrings prevent the forward bend from starting in the hips, modify with a strap (see the modifications section).

Spine—Students often have trouble keeping the back straight. To help a student lengthen the spine, squat or kneel behind the student and place the heels of your hands at the bottom edge of her or his rib cage. Lift, ever so lightly, as the student exhales. This action helps tilt the pelvis forward and lengthens through the lower back. Do not press downward on a student in this position; doing so may result in back injury!



Adjustment: spine; shoulders.



UNSTABLE

Unstable and possibly harmful alignment: spine and shoulders rounded.

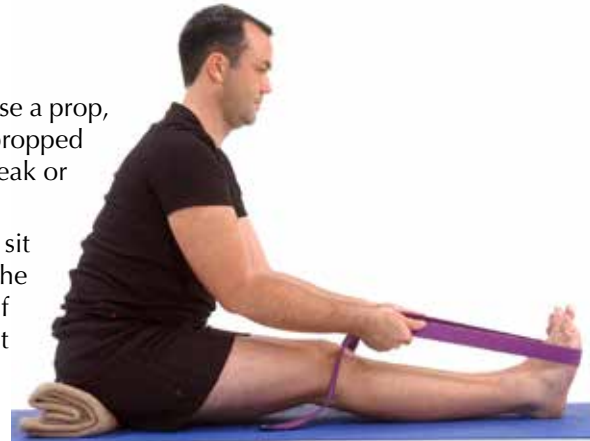
Shoulders—If a student’s back is rounded, the shoulders will usually be rounded as well. To help the student roll the fronts of the shoulders open, kneel behind the student and place a hand on each shoulder with your fingers draped just in front of the junction of the arm, shoulder, and chest. Use your hands to gently draw the collarbones apart and lightly press the shoulders down. At the same time, you can softly press your knee into the student’s mid back, thus lifting the chest and opening the shoulders.

Neck—The student’s neck should be actively aligned with the spine in the active phase of the pose and should be relaxed in the resting phase. The key is to keep space in the neck between the head and shoulders regardless of the phase.

MODIFICATIONS

Spinal weakness—When practicing this pose, it is common to use a prop, such as a strap, pillow, or folded blanket. A blanket or bolster propped under the hips takes some of the pressure and work off of a weak or rounded back.

Tight hamstrings or hips—Students benefit greatly when they sit propped up on a blanket or bolster. This positioning helps tilt the front pelvis forward to ease the hamstrings and lower back. If a student cannot reach the hands to the feet, offer the student a strap to wrap around the feet. The strap allows the student to get an extra stretch in the shoulders and lateral torso. The student should not grasp the strap tightly, because doing so tightens the upper body in the pose.



Modification: tight hamstrings or hips.

KINEMATICS

If a student is very close to bringing the chest down to the legs, you can assist in deepening the flexion. However, when applying adjustments in this posture, be certain that your hand placement and the movement of the adjustment are mechanically sound. *Never* press down on the student’s spine to deepen the forward bend! Doing so would put excessive strain on the spinal ligaments and discs.

To begin, kneel behind the student and lightly place your palms flat against the student’s upper pelvis with your fingers pointing toward the ground. Keep your hands in position and gently lift and lengthen the pelvis toward the direction of the head. The pelvis will not actually lift, but the motion will elongate the lower spine and help the student flex at the hip joint, rather than allowing the low spine to round. Also, make certain that you move according to the student’s breath pattern; actively provide the adjustments as the student exhales to keep the energy flow.

Paschimottanasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Thigh	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, sartorius, rectus femoris (C, I)	Deep external rotators, hamstrings, gluteus maximus
	Hip flexion more than 120 degrees	Rectus abdominis (C, I)	
Torso	Spinal extension, stability	Erector spinae (E, I)	Quadratus lumborum, erector spinae
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum, erector spinae (I)	

(continued)

Paschimottanasana (*continued*)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Shoulder	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids and mid trapezius (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi
	Scapular stability	Serratus anterior	
	Humeral flexion	Deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii, coracobrachialis, supra-spinatus (C, I)	
	Postural support 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)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, brachialis
Lower arm	Elbow extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digitorum profundus and superficialis, flexor digiti minimi and brevis, interossei palmaris (C, I)	
Neck	Head extension, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis, upper trapezius (C, I)	

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

Gomukhasana



Cow's Face Pose

[go-mook-AHH-suh-nuh]

Go in Sanskrit means “cow,” and *mukha* is the word for “face.” At first glance, this pose may not seem to resemble the face of the gentle and symbolically nurturing creature after which it is named. You may see the pattern, however, if you look at your image in the mirror while practicing this pose. The arms are like a cow’s ears, and the legs form the shape of a cow’s mouth.

DESCRIPTION

In this seated asana, the legs are on the ground, stacked in front of the hips with the knees bent. One knee is folded on top of the other, aligned with the middle of the body. The spine is upright, and the arms are bent, with one elbow pointed up and the other pointed down as the hands reach toward each other and bind behind the back. Note: Sometimes the two halves of the pose are done separately.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the outer thigh of the leg resting on the ground.



BENEFITS

- Opens the chest and shoulders.
- Improves circulation.
- Stretches the arms and wrists.
- Relieves discomfort for headache sufferers and postnatal women.
- Relieves sciatica.

⚠ CAUTIONS

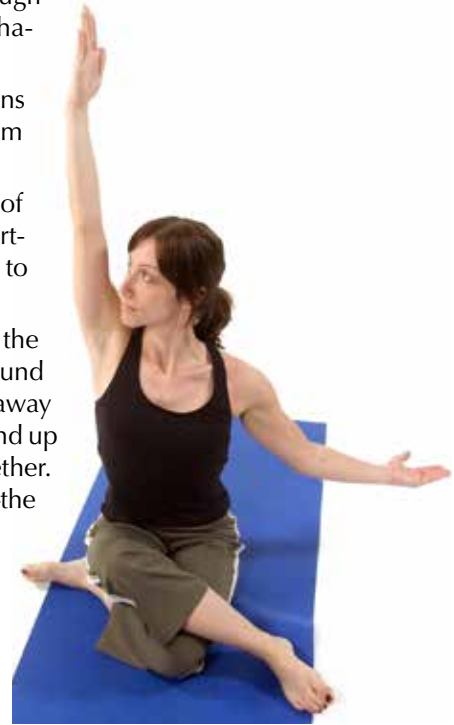
Hip replacements—Students with a hip replacement are advised not to cross the legs over the midline of the body. They may practice the arm portion of the posture and sit in any other comfortable position.

Shoulder injury—Advise students with any shoulder injury to use caution. For students with rotator-cuff tears, the anterior shoulder of the bottom arm is usually sensitive and tight in this pose, thus making it inadvisable for them to rotate the arm externally. Students with a history of shoulder dislocation should modify the pose with the use of a strap so that the hand does not reach as far behind the back.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), exhale and bend your right knee, drawing your thigh toward your chest. Cross your right foot over your left leg, placing your foot on the ground outside your left thigh as close to the hip as is comfortable.

- Externally rotate your left leg so that your left little toe moves toward the ground. Flex your left knee and bring your left heel to the outside of your right hip.
- Exhale and relax your right hip, allowing your knee to rotate externally and rest on the top of your left knee. Draw your right foot as close to your left hip as is comfortable.
- Dorsiflex your feet so that the toes point toward your knees. Root through your sit bones and settle into the stability of your pelvis. With each exhalation, relax your legs more.
- Inhale and reach your right arm overhead so that your upper arm aligns with your ear. Externally rotate the arm, pointing the thumb away from your body.
- Soften your right shoulder and bend your right elbow. Slide the palm of your right hand down your back to the lowest vertebra you can comfortably reach. Inhale and lift the elbow toward the sky, being mindful not to push your head forward.
- Extend your left arm out to the side with your palm facing up. Keep the front of your shoulder rolled open and place your left hand to the ground behind you. Rotate (pronate) your lower arm so that the palm faces away from your body. Bend your left elbow and reach the back of your left hand up your spine toward your right hand. If your hands touch, bind them together. If not, simply focus on pointing your elbows in opposite directions—the right elbow to the sky, the left one to the ground.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Inhale and lift your chest upward to keep your spine elongated. Exhale and let your shoulders relax. Feel the space opening between your ears and shoulders, keeping your neck long yet soft.
- To exit this posture, inhale and release your fingers. Slowly bring both hands down to your sides. Exhale and lift your right knee off of your left. Lean back slightly and straighten your left leg, then your right leg, and prepare for the next side.



To prepare the shoulders for the bind, extend your left arm out to the side with your palm facing up.

ADJUSTMENTS

Back—If the student's upper back is rounded, kneel behind the student, place the palms of your hands just below the scapulae, and slowly press the rib cage forward and up.

Arms—If the student's elbows are abducted and aligned wider than shoulder-width apart, place your hands against the outsides of the upper arms, near the shoulders, and gently press the arms closer toward the student's midline.

Hands—If the student's hands do not touch but are very close, you may be able, with the student's permission, to move the hands the extra distance to enable them to meet. Kneel behind the student and place your hands on the student's upper arms, just above the elbows. Carefully and slowly, press the hands closer together.

MODIFICATIONS

Hips—If the hips are not level on the ground, place a blanket under the lower hip. As an option, the student can sit on the foot of the bottom leg to raise the hip level.

Hip replacement—Instruct the student to sit in any comfortable position where the thighs do not cross over each other.

Tight shoulders—If a student cannot reach the hands together without assistance, ask the student to hold the ends of a strap between the hands.



Modification: tight shoulders.

KINEMATICS

Gomukhasana provides an excellent stretch for the triceps. If a student is unable to touch the hands together, it is beneficial for the student to use a strap of some type between the hands. The strap allows the student to hold the arm positioning with much more ease. Remind the student to keep a fairly relaxed grip on the strap so as not to tighten the arms.

Gomukhasana (Right Elbow Up, Left Elbow Down)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	Adductors, tensor fascia lata, gluteus medius and minimus
	Initial external rotation, adduction	Adductors, sartorius (E)	
	Initial external rotation	Gluteus medius, deep external rotators* (C, I, R)	
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum, hamstrings (I)	
Torso	Torso stability	Rectus abdominis, internal and external obliques, transverse abdominis (C, I)	
	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
	Sternoclavicular stability	Subclavius (I)	
Shoulder (R)	Horizontal flexion of humerus	Pectoralis major, coracobrachialis, anterior and middle deltoid (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, trapezius, pectoralis major and minor
	Stability and external rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor (C, I)	
	Supporting posture in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
	Scapular stability, lateral rotation	Serratus anterior (I)	
Shoulder (L)	Hyperextension and adduction of humerus	Latissimus dorsi, teres major (C, I)	Anterior deltoid, upper trapezius, levator scapulae, subscapularis
	Stability and external rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii (C, I)	Triceps brachii
Lower arm (R)	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Lower arm (L)	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, extensor digiti minimi brevis, dorsal interossei (C, I)	
	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension	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 (in the body segment column) or relaxed (in the muscles active column).



Paripurna Navasana

Full Boat Pose

[par-ee-POUR-nuh naah-VAAH-suh-nuh]

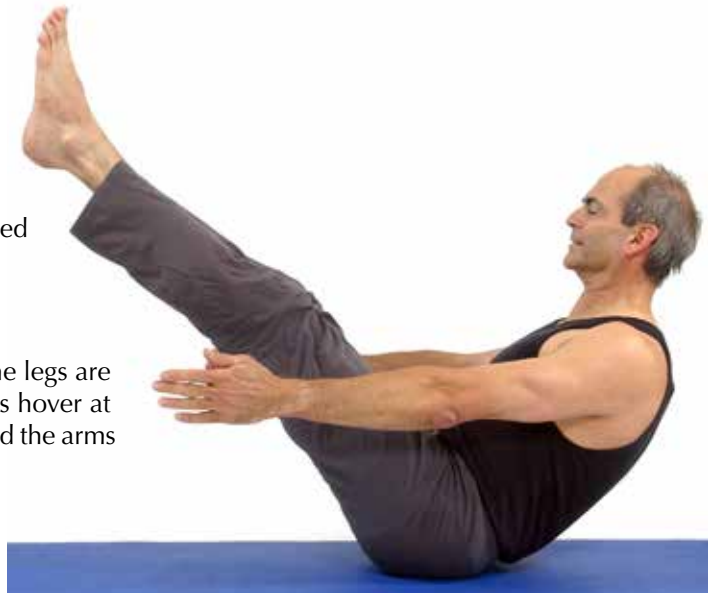
Paripurna means “full” or “complete,” and *nava* is Sanskrit for “ship” or “boat.” The shape of the body in Navasana resembles a boat with the oars balanced in the water.

DESCRIPTION

Navasana is a seated jackknife balancing position. The legs are raised off the ground with straight knees, and the toes hover at eye level. The spine is straight and reclined slightly, and the arms are extended parallel to the ground.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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



FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. For those with stronger abdominals and no low-back concerns, the root can move back more fully onto the sacrum.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens the thighs, hips, abdominal muscles, and back; targets the core musculature.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Stimulates digestion.
- Builds balance and concentration.

⚠ CAUTION

Pregnancy or injury—Pregnant or injured students are advised to avoid this posture.

Intestinal discomfort—Due to the pressure created in the abdomen, students with intestinal discomfort should refrain from practicing this pose until the discomfort passes.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), exhale and bend your knees, bringing them toward your chest. Keep the soles of your feet flat on the ground. Place your hands on the backs of your thighs and lift your chest as you inhale. Keep your spine long and your shoulders relaxed.
- Exhale and begin to recline your torso with your spine straight. Feel your abdominal muscles and hip flexors engage to support your spine and notice your balance shifting toward the backs of your sit bones.
- On an exhalation, slowly lift your feet off the ground, keeping your knees flexed. Balance here between your sit bones and your tailbone and slowly take your hands away from the backs of your thighs, bringing your arms to your sides parallel to the ground.

- If this position feels comfortably challenging, stay here and focus on your breath. If your back feels fatigued but your abdominals feel strong, bring your hands again to the backs of your thighs for support.
- If you feel strong and comfortable, especially in your low back, then roll farther back onto your sacrum so that there is more activity in your abdominal muscles. Remain relaxed in your shoulders, with a long torso.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To go further, into the full Navasana (Paripurna Navasana), place your hands behind your thighs again. Use your arms to hold onto your legs to assist or relieve your low back and legs. Exhale and gradually straighten your knees, bringing your toes to eye level. Look toward your toes with a soft gaze.
- If and when you feel ready, release your hands so that your arms are once again parallel to the ground. Breathe length and strength from your sit bones to your hands and feet. You are in full Navasana *if* you are breathing!
- To exit the position, exhale and slowly lower your feet back to the ground and sit upright. To rest your thighs and abdominal muscles, lower your legs into Baddha Kona-sana (Bound Angle) and rest before the next posture.



Adjustment: spine.

ADJUSTMENTS

Spine—It often takes a little practice before a student has enough strength to keep the spine from rounding. If the torso is collapsing inward, direct your student to maintain spinal alignment by keeping the hands behind the thighs and focusing on the breath while continuing to elongate the torso. Another option is to kneel behind the student and lightly support the spine with your knee or palm in order to create more length and support.

Legs—If the student's legs are shaking and the student is having difficulty keeping the legs extended, kneel beside the student and place your closest forearm under the calves to support the legs briefly. Place your other arm behind the student's back to support the spine, as well. Supporting the legs enables the student to straighten the legs more fully and build strength.



Adjustment: legs.

MODIFICATIONS

Weakness or fatigue—For a weak or tired student, the intensity of the pose can be reduced by bending the knees. Also, to build strength, instruct the student to keep the feet on the ground while reclining for a few breaths at a time.

Building strength—The student can use the arms for support by placing the hands on the ground behind the hips with the elbows bent. Instruct the student to raise one leg while maintaining the integrity of the upper body. After a few breaths, the student can switch to the other side.

Tailbone concerns—Occasionally, a student complains of tailbone pain when reclining in this asana. First, instruct the student to sit on a folded blanket. If this does not alleviate the pain, skip this pose altogether, or instruct the student to recline only somewhat and to focus on lifting the feet off the ground while maintaining an elongated spine.



Modification: weakness or fatigue.

KINEMATICS

For students who are new or weaker, the balance point of the body falls between the ischial tuberosities (sit bones) and the tailbone. If the body is balanced above the tailbone, higher onto the pelvis, the likelihood of flexion in the lumbar spine increases, as does the possibility of injury. For more experienced or stronger students, balancing on the flattened sacrum provides more concentrated strengthening of the abdominals; it is important that these students do not have any lumbar or sacral concerns.

Paripurna Navasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg	Plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (C, I)	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus
Thigh	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings
	Thigh adduction	Adductors, gracilis (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	
Torso	Spinal extension, stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	
Shoulder	Humerus flexion	Pectoralis major, anterior deltoid, coracobrachialis (C, I)	
	Joint stability	Trapezius, rhomboids, teres minor (I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension, stability	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis, triceps brachii (E, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	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)	
Neck	Neck extension against gravity	Sternocleidomastoid, scalenes (C, I)	

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

Baddha Konasana



Bound Angle Pose

[BUD-dhuh kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

Baddha is Sanskrit for “bound,” and *kona* means “angle.” This posture is often called “Cobbler’s Pose” because it replicates the traditional seated position for East Indian shoemakers. The shoemakers used the feet to hold a shoe so that both hands were free. The pose is also referred to as Butterfly Pose by teachers who do not use Sanskrit terms in their teaching and in children’s classes.

DESCRIPTION

In this seated asana, the knees are bent and the legs rotated externally with the soles of the feet either pressed together or held together with the hands to make a seal or lock. Variations of this posture involve making the space between the ankles and the groin more or less open.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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



FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the outer legs and the outsides of the feet. Connect with the energy of the heels and toes of each foot pressing together.

BENEFITS

- Promotes wellness in the urinary and reproductive organs.
- Increases general circulation by stretching the major arteries and lymph glands in the groin, legs, and thighs.
- Stretches the adductor muscles of the thighs.
- Relieves mild depression symptoms.
- Can help alleviate pain from sciatica.
- Relieves discomfort for pregnant and menstruating women.
- Helps ease childbirth, if practiced regularly.

⚠ CAUTION

Knee, hip, or groin injury—Students with such an injury should use modifications and props.

VERBAL CUES

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), exhale and bring your knees toward your chest. Inhale and let the outside of your knees slowly lower toward the ground.

- Root through your sit bones with your body weight evenly distributed to both sides. Inhale and keep your spine lifted and strong, and reach your tailbone and sit bones slightly back toward the end of your mat by slightly folding the front pelvis forward. Settle back firmly on the base of your pelvis.
- Bring your hands to the ground beside your hips and press the soles of your feet together. Feel your knees move slightly closer to the ground as you exhale softly. Press lightly into your arms to open more length through the sides without lifting your hips off the ground.
- Maintain the length in your spine and place your hands on your ankles or clasp your fingers around your feet, keeping your shoulders relaxed.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- Inhale deeply to elongate your torso. On your next exhalation, fold forward from your hips, feeling your pelvis rock forward. Imagine lowering your chest toward the ground beyond your feet. Soften your shoulders and continue to keep your hands around your ankles or feet for leverage. Feel free to gently press your elbows against your inner legs to help open your thighs slightly more. You can also place your hands on the ground—however you are most comfortable.
- If your hips feel comfortable, use your hands to draw the soles of your feet open toward the sky. This action gently rolls your outer legs closer to the ground, thus opening the groin more deeply. Place your hands on your mid thighs and gently rotate your thighs externally to open them. As always, when you inhale, lengthen your spine and extend the crown of your head beyond your feet.
- To exit this posture, place your hands to the ground beside your hips. Press firmly through your arms and inhale as you lift slowly through your chest and the crown of your head. Exhale and stretch your legs out in front of you as you move back into Dandasana.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—Instruct the student to actively press the outer edges of the soles of the feet together. Gently brush the feet with your hands as a reminder.

Knees—If the student has difficulty lowering the knees to the ground, help the student roll the soles of the feet up by pressing the tops of the feet toward the ground. Instruct the student to open the soles of the feet as if opening a book. This action rotates both legs externally.

Spine—To help support the student's back, sit or kneel behind the student with your shin against the back. Place your hands lightly on the mid thighs while gently rotating the legs externally. Press your shoulder or knee lightly against the student's spine and lift. This action encourages length in the back.

MODIFICATIONS

Groin or knee injury—Place blocks or blankets under the student's outer knees and hips for support.

Tight hips—Instruct the student to make the knee angle larger by moving the feet farther from the body. The student may also keep the feet slightly apart for comfort. Most students with tight hips also benefit greatly from propping the outer legs as in the previous modification.

Weak or injured spine—Place the student on the back for spinal support but open the angle between the legs to stretch the groin. This positioning is called Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclining Bound Angle). If this positioning still creates a strain on the spine, instruct the student to lie on the ground with the legs against a wall and place the soles of the feet together while gently pressing the knees toward the wall.

Pregnancy—Place stacked bolsters, blankets, or a chair in front of the student and have her rest her arms and forehead on the prop for support. This modification works well for all seated forward bends.



Modification: groin or knee injury.

KINEMATICS

In this posture, it is sometimes difficult for students to recognize why the knees do not come all the way down to the ground. Common sense would suggest that tight adductors are the culprits, and this is true in many cases. However, other factors are often involved as well—specifically, tight hip rotators and individual anatomical differences.

For students with tight hips, the forward-bend portion of the asana is made possible by a coordinated effort between the hip flexors (iliopsoas and rectus femoris), the spinal extensors (erector spinae), and sometimes the arms. The forward bend is initiated by an eccentric contraction of the spinal muscles; if initiated with an exhalation, the contraction of the abdominal muscles also aids reciprocally in allowing the spinal muscles to soften. Then, to aid in the flexion, the hip flexors contract concentrically to help draw the torso down farther. Because of the external rotation of the femurs, the angle of contraction in the flexors may not allow a person to lower any farther without using the arms to draw the torso down as well. Students should keep the shoulders relaxed when using the arms and should not force the torso downward.

Baddha Konasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg	Ankle inversion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)	Peroneals
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, quadriceps (C, I)	Iliopsoas, quadriceps (after external rotation), gracilis, sartorius
	Initiates external rotation	Adductors (E)	
	External rotation	Deep external rotators,* gluteus medius (C, I)	
	Flexion, external rotation	Sartorius (C, I)	
Torso	Spine extension, stability	Erector spinae, semispinalis, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis (C, I)	
Shoulder	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Brachialis, biceps brachii, brachioradialis (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger and thumb flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei dorsales manus and palmaris, opponens digiti minimi, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, semispinalis (I)	

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

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



Upavishtha Konasana

Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend

[oo-puh-VISH-tuh kohn-AAH-suh-nuh]

Upavishtha means “seated” or “sitting” in Sanskrit; *kona* means “angle.”



DESCRIPTION

Upavishtha Konasana is a seated straddle position. With the legs outstretched from the center, the torso folds forward toward the ground from the hips.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the backs of the heels.

BENEFITS

- Opens the hips.
- Stretches the groin, hamstrings, and low back.
- Stimulates digestion.
- In a complete forward bend, deeply stretches the hips and lengthens the torso.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Back pain or injury—Practice with modification or skip the pose.

Advanced pregnancy (where the belly gets in the way of folding forward)—Practice with the use of props to support the abdomen and back.

VERBAL CUES

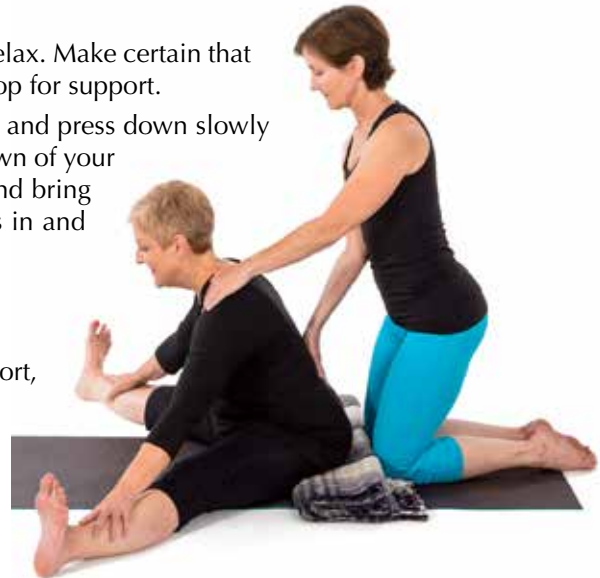
- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), inhale and move your legs apart as wide as you comfortably can, making sure that the stretch in the groin is not intense. Point your tailbone and sit bones toward the back of your mat, which will tilt the front of your pelvis slightly forward.
- Root the fronts of your sit bones into the ground and imagine energy drawing from the top of your head downward toward your hips. Point your toes and knees up. Breathe deeply and slowly and lift your rib cage away from your hips.
- Inhale and reach your arms up and then out to your sides as you expand your chest. Gaze forward with your chin parallel to the ground and your ears aligned over your shoulders.
- As you keep your chin and chest lifted, exhale and fold slowly forward from your hips. Maintain length in your spine as you bring your chest closer to the ground. Stop at the first point of resistance and breathe length through your entire spine. Keep your chest open and your upper back long.
- Lower your arms and place your hands above or below your knees or on the ground in front of your legs. Press lightly down into your hands and use this energy to support your back and rib cage as you lift the chest higher, slightly arching the back. Exhale and fold forward more deeply from the hip joints.

- Continue to focus on your breath.
- When you get to the point where you feel that you want to relax your back, stay in this position and breathe deeply, allowing your breath to loosen and soften your muscles. Imagine the breath expanding between your vertebrae and ribs.
- On the next exhalation, allow your body to completely relax. Make certain that your spine feels comfortable and use your hands or a prop for support.
- To exit this posture, bring your hands to your mid thighs and press down slowly but firmly. Inhale and lift through your chest and the crown of your head, coming once again to a seated position. Exhale and bring your legs together again in Dandasana. Roll your thighs in and out to loosen your hip joints and hamstrings.

ADJUSTMENTS

Knees—If the student needs to bend the knees slightly for comfort, seat the student on folded blankets or a bolster to help lift the hips and decrease stress on the hamstrings and low back.

Spine—If the student rounds the spine in the forward fold, cue the student to sit upright slowly and begin again. Kneel behind the student and place your hand lightly on the mid back and encourage length by moving the fingers up the spine toward the head.



Adjustment: spine.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight back or hamstrings—Seat the student on a folded blanket or bolster to help tilt the pelvis slightly forward. You can also invite the student to keep the knees bent slightly or place a small rolled-up towel behind the knees.

Pregnancy—Help the student keep the abdomen open and not compressed. Place a chair or stacked blankets in front of the student for her to rest her hands on. As the student flexes forward slightly, the support of the chair allows her to keep the torso upright. The student may also rest her arms and head on a chair with a pillow for relaxation. Many students also find a soft bolster or pillow under the growing abdomen to be comfortably supportive.

Weakness or injury—Modify the seated posture to a restorative one such as Viparita Karani (Restorative Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose), in which the heels and backs of the legs are against a wall and the back is on the ground.



Modification: pregnancy.

KINEMATICS

As the upper body flexes forward, people with tight adductors often find that the legs roll into internal rotation. To help make your students aware of this action, give them an additional verbal cue to keep the knees and toes pointing upward or slightly externally rotated. Remind students to focus the breath softly into the groin and hamstrings if they feel any tightness in these areas, and not to push beyond the first point of resistance.

Upavishtha Konasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	
Thigh	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion over 120 degrees	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I)	
	Thigh abduction, stability	Tensor fascia lata, gluteus medius and minimus (C, I)	Adductors, gracilis
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, transverse abdominis (C, I)	
Shoulder	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Humerus horizontal extension	Mid and posterior deltoid, supraspinatus (C, I)	
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Joint stability	Subscapularis, teres minor, infraspinatus	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger and thumb flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei dorsales manus and palmaris, opponens digiti minimi, flexor pollicis brevis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae (I)	

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

Parighasana



Kneeling Triangle, or Gate Pose

[par-eegh-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Sanskrit, *parigha* is the word for a crossbar used to lock a gate, which is the shape of the body in this posture. Physically, this side stretch lengthens the intercostals (rib muscles) and enables the expansion of the breath. In a metaphysical sense, the breath is the gateway that connects the mind, body, and spirit.

DESCRIPTION

This intense side stretch is generally practiced in a kneeling position with one leg abducted and rotated externally. It can also be described as a kneeling version of Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle). The deeper variation of this posture requires considerable flexibility in the lateral torso because the hips are lowered onto the ground.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

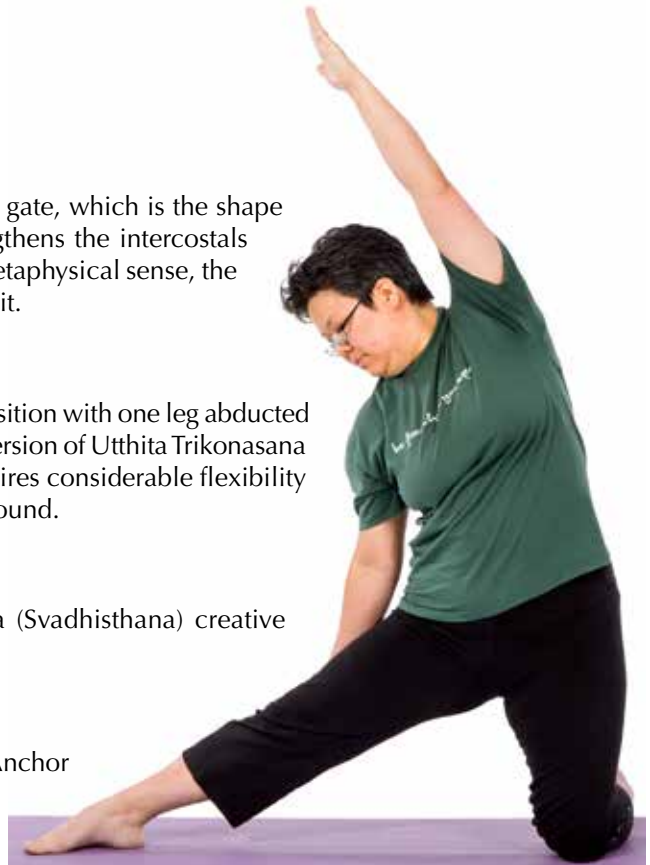
First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy, third chakra (Manipurna) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the knee and the top of the foot of the bent leg. Anchor into the heel and possibly the toes of the straight leg.

BENEFITS

- Applies a deep lateral stretch to the torso and low back.
- Loosens the spine.
- Stretches the pelvis and chest.
- Strengthens the lateral abdominal muscles.
- Aids in digestion.



⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee concerns—Practice with modifications.

Back concerns—Those with back pain or injury should limit the lateral stretch to some degree and use props for support.

VERBAL CUES

- From a kneeling position, place your knees hip-width apart with your thighs perpendicular to the ground. Align your spine and legs as in Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Abduct your right leg, keeping it in line with your torso. Rotate the top of your right thigh externally so that your knee and toes point upward.
- If possible, press your right forefoot flat against the ground to help support your balance and stretch the upper ankle. If this action strains the ankle or causes cramping, allow your toes to lift slightly off the ground. Anchor into your left knee and right heel.
- Stretch your arms out to your sides with your palms facing downward. Inhale and lengthen your spine, reaching the crown of your head toward the sky.

- As you exhale, reach your right arm out over your right leg, maintaining length in your low back. When you have stretched out as far as you comfortably can, slowly lower your right hand toward the ground without placing any upper body weight on your right leg. Be sure that your left thigh remains perpendicular to the ground and does not shift to either side.
- Sweep your left arm forward, then reach over your head, bringing your upper arm close to your left ear. Point your palm toward the midline of your body. Continue to gaze forward; however, if there is tension in your neck, look down to your right foot.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- As you breathe, notice your breath filling your entire torso, lengthening your sides. Feel the muscles between your ribs expand as your spine continues to lengthen. Keep your torso aligned over your right leg.
- To exit this pose, press your right foot firmly into the ground and sweep your left hand out to the left side of your body. As you inhale, feel yourself lifted by your left arm. Exhale and lower your arms to your sides. Bring your right knee back under your body and prepare to move to the left side.



Adjustment: extended thigh.

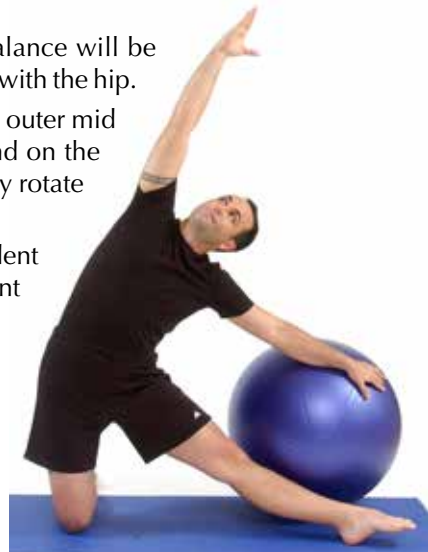
ADJUSTMENTS

Foot of extended leg—If the student's foot is not aligned with the hip, the balance will be compromised. Invite the student to slide the foot back so that the heel is in line with the hip.

Extended thigh—Squat or kneel behind the student and place one hand on the outer mid ribcage or the hip of the kneeling leg to provide stability, and the other hand on the mid thigh of the straight leg. Gently draw the muscles toward you to externally rotate the leg and open the pelvic region.

Rib cage—If the torso is sinking into the extended thigh, kneel behind the student and lightly place your hand on the outer portion of the rib cage. Cue the student to lengthen the spine and draw the ribs away from your hand.

Shoulders—To help open the chest and shoulders, squat or kneel behind the student, place your nearest hand on the student's upper arm, and slowly rotate the arm externally. Cue the student to maintain length in the neck.



Modification: tight back or sides.

MODIFICATIONS

Knee pain—If the student has difficulty placing the total body weight on the knees, double up the mat or place other padding under the joint.

Tight hamstrings or adductors—Instruct the student to keep the extended knee slightly bent.

Tight back or sides—If the student is unable to reach the ground with the bottom hand, place a block or other prop to the outside of the extended leg. This modification allows the student to keep weight off of the leg yet remain balanced.

Posture deepening—Instead of keeping the thigh of the bent knee perpendicular to the ground, the hips can be flexed so that the sit bones rest on the ground. If flexibility allows, the hands can reach overhead toward the foot of the straight leg. This variation should be practiced only by students with sufficient range of motion in the hips and knees to allow for deepening the asana comfortably.



Modification: deepening the pose.

KINEMATICS

The upper-body and hip mechanics of this posture are similar to those in Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle), except that this is a kneeling posture. As with Trikonasana, the emphasis here is to keep the torso mainly in the frontal plane and to continue to encourage length in the spine.

Parighasana (Leg Abducted to Right Side)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes (R)	Toe flexion (pressure into ground)	Flexors digitorum and hallucis longus, flexor digitorum brevis (C, I)	
Foot and toes (L)	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus, extensor hallucis longus, anterior tibialis (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (C, I)	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus, anterior tibialis
Lower leg (L)	Ankle plantar flexion and stability	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus, peroneals (C, I)	
Thigh (R)	Knee extension	Quadriceps (C, I)	
Thigh (L)	Knee flexion	Hamstrings, gastrocnemius (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip abduction and external rotation	Tensor fascia lata, deep external rotators,* gluteus medius and minimus (C, I)	Hamstrings, adductors
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip extension, stability	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas, quadriceps
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, hamstrings, quadratus lumborum (I)	
Torso	Trunk stability	Rectus abdominis, internal and external obliques, transverse abdominis (I)	
Torso (L)	Lateral flexion to right	Quadratus lumborum, erector spinae, internal and external obliques (E, I)	Quadratus lumborum, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi, internal and external obliques
Shoulder (R)	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Humerus horizontal flexion	Middle and posterior deltoid, supraspinatus (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Humerus flexion	Anterior deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm (R)	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Forearm extension	Anconeus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R and L)	Wrist extension	Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (L)	Finger adduction	Interossei palmaris, adductor pollicis (C, I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, sternocleidomastoid, scalenes (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.



Virasana

Hero Pose

[veer-AAH-suh-nuh]

Vira is Sanskrit for “hero” or “champion.” In Hindu mythology, the thighs are an extremely important part of the body, signifying virility and power. This pose focuses an intense stretch in the front thighs (quadriceps).

DESCRIPTION

Virasana is a deep kneeling posture in which the hips are seated on the ground between the feet. Variations of this asana are used to sit in certain styles of meditation.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones as they rest either on the ground, on a prop, or on the backs of the calves. Anchor into the tops of the feet and the shins.

BENEFITS

- Helps alleviate calcaneal (heel) spurs and strengthens the arches.
- Stretches the quadriceps and ankles.
- Helps alleviate arthritis pain in the feet and ankles.
- Provides good spinal support for meditation (better than sitting cross-legged).
- Stimulates digestion.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Acute knee injury—Students with undiagnosed knee pain should not practice this posture. Others with a knee injury should proceed cautiously and with modifications.

Circulatory concerns—Students with cardiac or other circulation concerns should avoid this pose.

VERBAL CUES

- Kneel on the ground with your knees approximately hip-distance apart. Rest the tops of your feet against the ground with your toes pointed directly backward.
- Exhale as you begin to slowly lower your hips toward your heels. Place your hands on your upper calves and rotate the bulk of your calf muscles away from the midline of your body. This action helps relax the knees as you lower farther and opens up space in which to place your hips.
- Keep your knees aligned and your spine lengthened as you lower your hips onto the ground between your ankles. If you notice your knees splaying, focus on drawing your inner thighs toward each other. This action will also provide an anchoring sensation in your pelvis.
- Inhale and lift your chest and the crown of your head upward. Roll your shoulders back and relax them to keep your chest expanding with your breath. Gaze softly forward, keeping length in the sides of your neck.



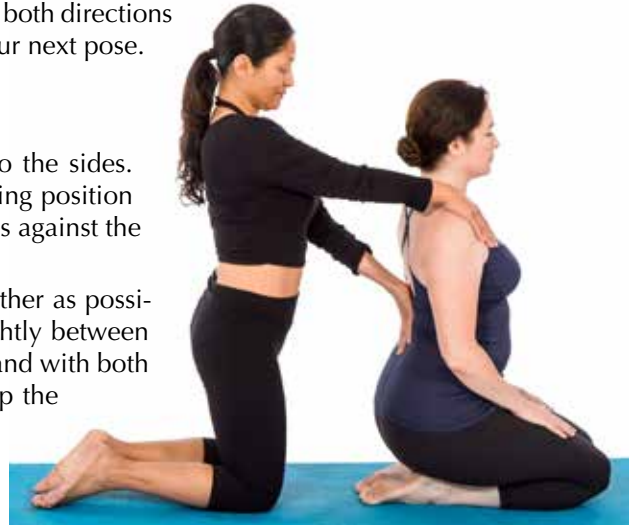
- Rest your hands at your sides or on top of your thighs. Breathe deeply and continue to relax your shoulders.
- Continue to focus on your breath, and feel your hips soften with each exhalation.
- To exit the position, place your hands on the ground beside your legs. Slowly shift your pelvis to one side and rest on the side of your hip. Extend your knees as you sweep your feet forward, bringing you into Dandasana. Roll your ankles in both directions in order to loosen your knees and hips. Prepare for your next pose.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—Ensure that the student's toes are not pointing out to the sides. If they are, instruct the student to come back into a kneeling position with the tops of the feet on the ground and the inner ankles against the side of the hips.

Knees—Take care that the student's knees are as close together as possible. Kneel in front of the student and place your hand lightly between the knee joints. Instruct the student to press against your hand with both knees. Remove your hand and instruct the student to keep the pressure constant.

Shoulders—Remind the student to keep length in the spine with the front shoulders rolled back. To help establish length in the upper spine, kneel or semi-squat behind the student, press your knee or palm lightly against the student's spine, and lift gently. Place your opposite hand on the student's nearest shoulder to help encourage openness in the chest.



Adjustment: shoulders.

MODIFICATIONS

Foot pain or tight ankles—If the student has a foot or ankle injury or complains of feeling uncomfortable with the top of the feet against the ground, place a folded blanket under the front of the ankle joint. It may also help to place the hips on a folded blanket or block.

Knee pain—Place a folded blanket or a block under the student's hips to open the angle under the knees. This action decreases pressure on the knee joints. Another possible modification is to bend only one knee at a time, especially if the student has pain or injury in one leg. From the low lunging position, instruct the student to extend one leg forward and lower the hips to the ground behind. Depending on the student's flexibility, she or he may wish to place a block or blanket under the hip of the straight leg.

Posture deepening—Instruct the student to interlace the fingers and press the palms out. Then have the student inhale and reach the hands over the head. On an exhalation, cue the student to bring the hands behind the hips and slightly recline the spine to achieve a deeper stretch in the quadriceps.



Modification: knee pain.



Modification: knee pain.

KINEMATICS

Sometimes a student rotates the lower legs externally in order to rest the pelvis on the ground between the heels. This action creates a risk of injury in the medial knee structures. Always check that the front of the shins is resting flat on the ground and that the calves and feet do not rotate externally.

Virasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum longus (I)	
Lower leg	Ankle plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (I, R)	Anterior tibialis, peroneals
	Internal rotation	Posterior tibialis (I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Quadriceps (E, R)	Quadriceps
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (E, R)	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus
Torso	Spine 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 (C, I)	
Shoulder	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Humerus adduction	Latissimus dorsi, pectoralis major (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris
	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi ulnaris, radialis longus and brevis (C, I)	
Hand and fingers	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (I)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae (I)	

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

Bharadvajasana



Bharadvaja's Pose

[bhuh-RUHD-vaah-JAAH-suh-nuh]

In Hindu mythology, Bharadvaja was one of the legendary Seven Seers. He was also the father of Drona, a great military leader who fought the war chronicled in the *Mahabharata*.

DESCRIPTION

Bharadvajasana is a gentle, seated twist that can be practiced with the legs in a sideways, leaning Virasana (Hero Pose) or with one leg in Virasana and the other in Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus Pose).

ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. In the basic position, anchor into the outside of the leg resting on the ground. In the deeper expression of the pose, anchor into the outside of the leg resting on the ground and press the top of the foot into the opposite hip.

BENEFITS

- Stretches and strengthens the low spine.
- Stretches the neck, shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles.
- Massages the internal organs.
- Helps relieve sciatica pain.
- Improves digestion.
- Helps relieve anxiety.



⚠ CAUTIONS

Acute knee concerns—Students with acute knee concerns should practice only the basic variation or use modifications.

Acute spinal concerns—Students with spinal concerns should limit rotation in the spine.

Intestinal discomfort—Due to the pressure created in the abdomen, students with intestinal discomfort should refrain from practicing this pose until the discomfort passes.

VERBAL CUES

- From Virasana (Hero's Pose), shift your body weight to your right hip and lower the hip to the ground. Keep your legs together and allow your left ankle to rest on top of the arch of your right foot.
- Inhale and lengthen your spine as you settle your hips more comfortably onto the ground. Exhale and bring your right hand to the ground behind your hip. Reach your left hand across your body to the outside of your right leg.

- As you exhale, focus on keeping the top of your pelvis level with the ground and continue to ground through your sit bones.
- With each inhalation, lengthen your spine, allowing your right arm to aid in keeping your spine perpendicular to the ground. With each exhalation, lightly press your right shoulder farther back, and rotate the front of the shoulder away from your chest in order to open more space in this area.
- Keep your right shoulder open, and slowly turn your head and look over your left shoulder. Align your chin with your shoulder without straining your neck. For a deeper stretch in the right side of your neck, slightly lower your chin toward your left shoulder.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- To exit this posture, exhale and slowly turn your head forward. Then inhale and slowly bring your chest forward. Lift your hips back over your heels into Virasana and prepare to practice the pose on the opposite side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—Be sure that the bottom foot is resting on the ground. Cue the student to relax both feet.

Hips—If the top of the student's pelvis is not level with the ground, place a blanket under the lower hip. Kneel behind the student, place your hands softly at the top of the pelvis, and apply light pressure downward. Be aware of the student's comfort level.

Spine—Remind the student to lift out of the low spine. Kneel behind the student, gently place your hand on the rounded spine, and encourage lengthening up.

Rotation—If the student has difficulty rotating the shoulder, squat or kneel behind the student and place one hand on the front of the shoulder joint nearest to you. Place your opposite hand on the student's outer rib cage and gently rotate the shoulder toward you as you gently press the rib cage away. Lightly lift the student's spine as you move the torso.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight spine or shoulders in the Ardha Padmasana

variation—If the student has difficulty grasping the toe, wrap a strap around the foot and cue the student to hold onto the other end with the hand behind the back.

Pose deepening—The following variation is for students who can sit comfortably in Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus Pose). Instruct students to cross the bottom leg over the top so that the foot rests in the crease of the opposite thigh in Ardha Padmasana. Next, instruct them to reach the hand farthest from the feet behind the back and toward the top foot. If possible, students can grab the big toe and use the connection for leverage while rotating.



Modification: tight spine or shoulders in the Ardha Padmasana variation.



Modification: deepening the posture.

KINEMATICS

In Bharadvajasana, the spine should remain perpendicular to the ground with all of the natural curves intact. However, because of tight hip extensors and rotators, some students find that they cannot keep both halves of the pelvis on the ground. To compensate, the low back curves laterally toward the legs; another compensation is to exaggerate the forward curve in the low spine (lordosis). For comfort and proper alignment, place a bolster or blanket under the hip farthest from the legs.

Bharadvajasana (Rotating Torso to Right)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg	Ankle stability	Gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals (I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	
	External rotation, stability	Adductors (E, I)	
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	
	Internal rotation	Deep external rotators* (E, I)	Deep external rotators, * gluteus medius
Torso (R and L)	Spinal stability	Rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)	
	Chest and rib elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)	
Torso (R)	Spinal rotation to right	Internal oblique, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	External oblique
Torso (L)	Spinal rotation to right	External obliques (C, I)	Quadratus lumborum, internal oblique, erector spinae
Shoulder (R)	Humeral extension	Posterior deltoid, latissimus dorsi (C, I)	Pectoralis major
	External rotation	Posterior deltoid, teres minor, infraspinatus (C, I)	
Shoulder (L)	Internal rotation and humeral extension (aids in spinal rotation)	Latissimus, posterior deltoid (C, I)	Quadratus lumborum
Upper arm (R)	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	
Upper arm (L)	Elbow extension against resistance (also aids in spinal rotation)	Triceps brachii (C, I)	
Lower arm (R)	Supination	Supinator (C, I)	
Lower arm (L)	Forearm pronation	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (R)	Wrist hyperextension	Extensor carpi radialis longus and brevis, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I)	Wrist flexors
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
Hand and fingers (L)	Wrist flexion	Flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus (C, I)	
	Finger extension	Extensor digitorum, indicis, and digiti minimi; lumbricales manus; interossei dorsales (C, I)	
Neck (R)	Head rotation to right, stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, occipitals, cervical erector spinae (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.



Padmasana

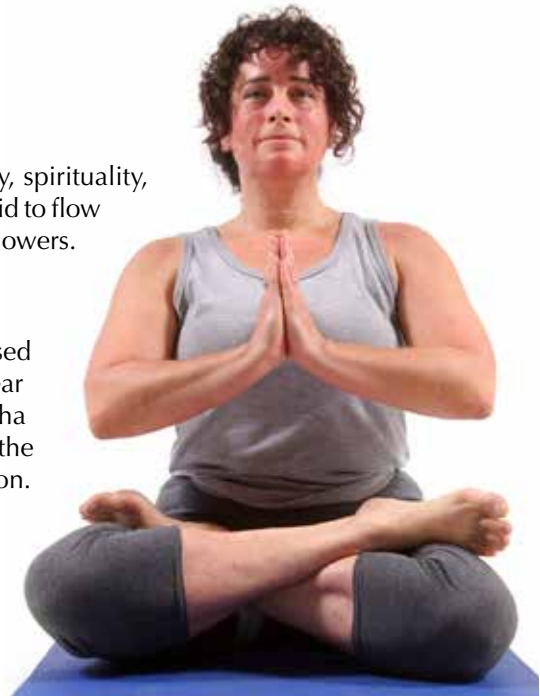
Lotus Pose

[puhd-MAAH-suh-nuh]

Padma is Sanskrit for “lotus flower,” which is associated with beauty, spirituality, and eternity. When meditating in Padmasana, the energy of prana is said to flow through the chakra centers, which are generally represented as lotus flowers.

DESCRIPTION

Padmasana is an upright, seated position in which the legs are crossed in front with each ankle resting comfortably on the opposite thigh near the crease of the hip. This is the quintessential seated asana in hatha yoga and East Indian meditation. Padmasana is said to connect the energies of the root chakra and the crown chakra while in meditation. To sit comfortably in this position, one needs flexible, open hips. This takes time and practice. Many people, especially in the West, have inflexible hip joints and cannot easily sit in this position without much preparatory work. Four variations of Padmasana are provided here so that students at every level of flexibility can sit in this restful position.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, seventh chakra (Sahasrara) divine energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root evenly through the sit bones. Anchor into the outer edges of the thighs while resting the outside of each foot against the opposite thigh.

BENEFITS

- Relieves stiffness in the hips, knees, and ankles.
- Strengthens the low spine and abdominal muscles.
- Promotes a relaxed, balanced posture.
- Increases circulation of interstitial fluids (lymph fluids).
- Boosts energy.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Acute knee injury—Students with acute knee concerns should either practice only the basic variation or use modifications.

Artificial joints—Students with a hip or knee replacement should either skip this pose or practice only with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

For all variations, emphasize to students that they should each respect the limits of their own body! Even if a student can normally come into Padmasana quite easily, there may be days when, because of body temperature or fatigue, the student has difficulty. Remind students to move slowly and to come into the posture only to the point where the body is most comfortably challenged. In this way, they can sit restfully.

First Variation: Baby Lotus

- From Dandasana (Staff Pose), bend your knees, then cross one ankle over the other and draw your feet in as close to your body as is comfortable. It is fine if your knees are lifted off the ground. However, if your knees are higher than your hips, it is best to sit on a folded blanket or bolster.
- Elongate your spine and allow your shoulders to relax. Rest your hands on your lap or down by your hips.
- Focus on your breath. Practice this pose on both sides to maintain balance in your hips.

Second Variation: Sukhasana [soo-KHAAH-suh-nuh] (Easy Pose)

- From Dandasana, bend your left knee and draw your heel close to your right hip. Next, bend your right knee and place your lower leg in front of your left shin. Your ankles do not cross in this position.
- Allow your knees to rotate easily toward the ground. This is generally a precursor to sitting comfortably in Padmasana.
- Elongate your spine and allow your shoulders to relax. Rest your hands on your lap or down by your hips.
- Focus on your breath. Practice this pose on both sides to maintain balance in your hips.

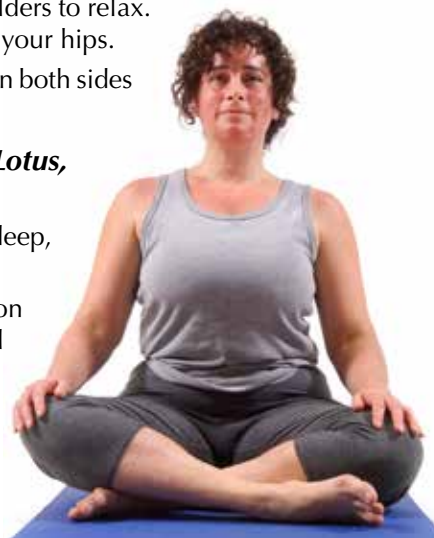


First variation: Baby Lotus.

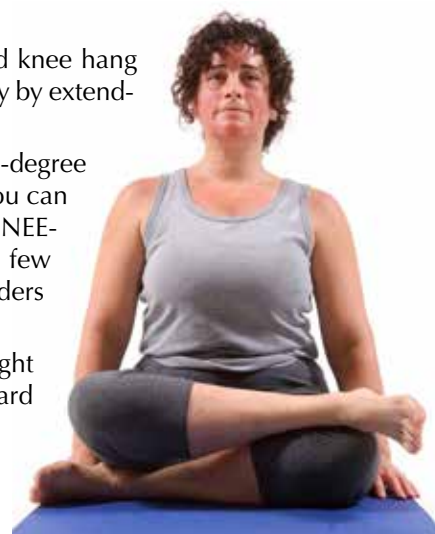
Third Variation: Ardha Padmasana (Half-Lotus, or Tailor's Seat)

This variation gets to the root of sitting in a deep, comfortable Padmasana.

- From Sukhasana, place your right foot on top of your left ankle and calf. If you feel comfortable doing so, wedge your right foot between your left calf and thigh to help keep your legs in this position.
- Focus on your breath.
- If there is no strain in your knee or hip, lift your light leg up slightly and bring your right knee inward toward the midline of your body. Breathe.
- Place your right ankle above your left knee so that your right foot and knee hang comfortably toward the ground. Move your left foot away from your body by extending your knee slightly.
- As comfortably as possible, move your legs so that the knees are at a 90-degree angle. Lower your top (right) knee toward your left ankle as much as you can in a relaxed manner. This position is called Agnistambhasana [ugh-NEE-stumb-AAH-suh-nuh] (Fire Log Pose). Relax and breathe here for a few breaths, elongating your spine as you inhale and softening your shoulders as you exhale.
- Turn the sole of your top (right) foot upward; if you can, bring your right heel slowly toward your navel. Move your right knee even more toward center. Be sure that the knee feels comfortable.
- Rest the top of your right ankle as close to the crease of your left thigh as is comfortable for you. Relax your right ankle so that the foot hangs over the outside of the thigh. Your right hip is stretched and open, thus allowing the ankle to soften.



Second variation: Sukhasana.



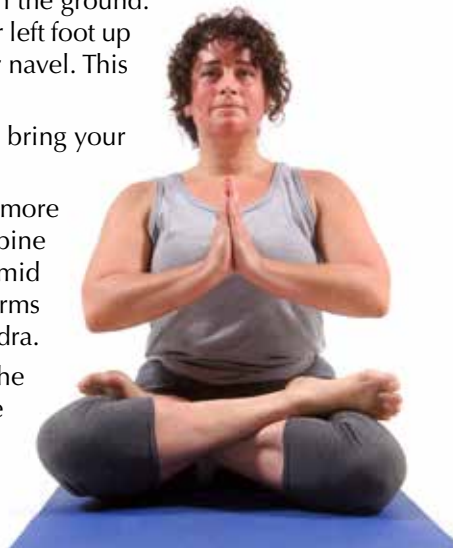
Third variation: Ardha Padmasana.



- As you relax your lower body into this posture, be sure to keep your spine straight, lengthened, and relaxed.
- Continue to Padmasana or, to exit this variation, extend your bottom leg and then your top leg. Loosen your hips, knees, and ankles by rolling your legs from side to side. Switch sides.

Fourth Variation: Padmasana (Full Lotus)

- From Ardha Padmasana, move your left (lower) leg away from your body so that the outside of your top thigh rests completely on the ground. Exhale and, as much as you comfortably can, bring your left foot up from the ground and draw your left heel in toward your navel. This action brings your left knee farther forward. Breathe.
- If your knees and hips still feel comfortable, inhale and bring your left ankle into the crease of your right thigh.
- Root into your sit bones as you relax your lower body more deeply into this position. Breathe length through your spine and relax your shoulders. Place your hands on your mid thighs with your palms facing upward and keep your arms relaxed, or bring your hands to your chest into Anjali Mudra.
- To exit this posture, slowly straighten your left leg. Roll the leg from side to side and rotate the ankle around. With the next breath, extend your right leg and loosen its joints. Although many people are more comfortable practicing on one side, it is always a good idea to practice this posture with the opposite leg positioning in order to keep both sides of the legs and hips loosened.



Fourth variation: Padmasana.

ADJUSTMENTS

Ankles—Students often complain of ankle pain when sitting in Ardha Padmasana or variations in which the ankle is on the ground. To cushion the bones, place a small folded towel under the foot. Also, if the feet are crossed over the opposite thigh, make sure that the ankles are not inverted (rolling inward); this positioning places undue stress on the lateral ankle structures. Instruct students to bring the knees more in line with the center or to move out of the position.

Knees—If much stress is placed on the knees as the adductors relax, place folded blankets, bolsters, or blocks under the outside of the thighs as a wedge.

Spine—If a student is rounding the back, place a blanket under the hips to lift the pelvis and lengthen the spine. Place your hand lightly on the spine to cue the student to sit taller through the spine and chest.

MODIFICATIONS

Low-back or hip tightness; weakness in all variations—Place a folded blanket under the student's hips. You can also place the student with his or her back against a wall for support.

Hip tightness—Depending on the degree of tightness, instruct the student to keep the legs in the most comfortable and least stressful position.



Modification: low back or hip tightness; weakness.

KINEMATICS

Many students are so determined to come into either Ardha Padmasana or Padmasana that they place excessive stress on all of the leg joints, especially the knees. A common error many students make is placing the ankle only partially across the opposite thigh. If the ankle is not draped over the thigh, the lateral ligaments and tendons become overstretched. Impress on your students the importance of sitting comfortably and without strain. Also, for students new to sitting in the full expression of this pose, it is essential to do a thorough warm-up of the hip and thigh muscles.

Padmasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)	
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)	
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)	Adductors
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas (C, I)	
	External rotation	Adductors (E, R)	Deep external rotators,* adductors
	Flexion and rotation	Sartorius (C, I)	
Torso	Spine extension, stability	Erector spinae, semispinalis, quadratus lumborum, (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis (C, I)	
Shoulder	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids major and minor, mid trapezius (C, I)	
	Postural support in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow flexion	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis (R)	
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (R)	
Hand and fingers	Finger flexion	Flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei palmaris, flexor pollicis brevis (R)	
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, semispinalis (I)	

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

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



Tolasana

Scale Pose

[tohl-AHH-suh-nuh]

Tola is the Sanskrit term for a measurement of mass. Because this pose resembles the balancing platform of a measuring scale, it is named Tolasana. In Ashtanga practice, this posture is called *Utpluti* (oot-PLUHT-tee).

DESCRIPTION

This arm-balance pose is generally used as a transition from one asana to another. Ideally, it is practiced with the legs in Padmasana (Full Lotus) and the body lifted off the ground and balanced between the hands. This asana requires strength, balance, and concentration.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

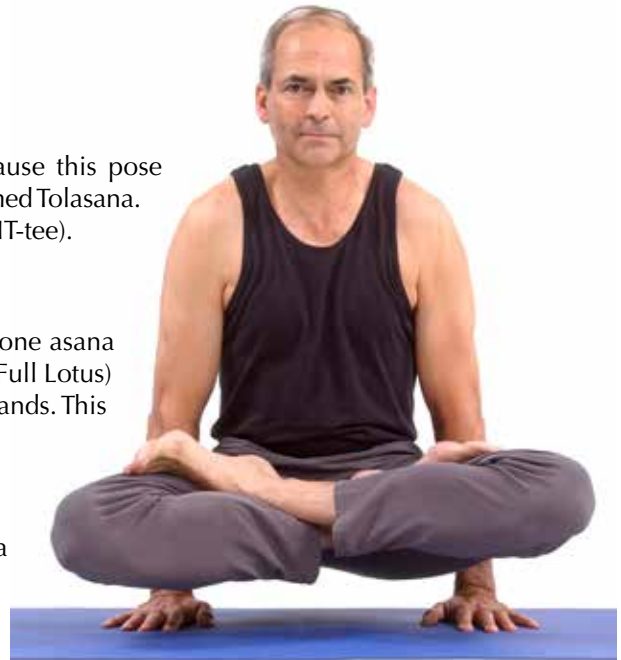
First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the metacarpal heads and fingertips in both hands.
Evenly balance the grounding energy in both hands.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens the abdominal muscles, arms, wrists, and hands.
- Increases balance and mental focus.
- Increases energy.
- Stretches the hips if the legs are in Padmasana.



⚠ CAUTIONS

Pregnancy—Due to the concentrated effort of the lower abdominals, this posture is not recommended beyond the second trimester.

Extreme weakness—Students with this condition should practice with modifications to increase strength.

Shoulder or wrist concerns—Students with shoulder or wrist injury should avoid this pose or practice with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- From the variation of Padmasana (Lotus Pose) that best coordinates with your ability, place your hands on the ground beside your hips. Hug your elbows in toward your rib cage and lightly squeeze your shoulder blades toward each other to open your chest.
- Inhale and lengthen your spine. Widen your fingers and press your hands onto the ground as you focus on anchoring into your fingertips and the heels of your hands.
- Exhale and straighten your elbows while you lift your hips off the ground. Draw your legs inward toward your lower abdominal area. Distribute your body weight evenly between your hands and feel the strength in your abdomen aiding your balance.

- Encourage a slight bend to your elbows to keep from hyperextending the joints. Relax the tops of your shoulders away from your ears and lift the crown of your head toward the sky. As you inhale, feel your chest lift as you open the fronts of your shoulders. Continue to be aware of the even balance between your hands, and the power in your abdominal area.
- Keep your breathing smooth and controlled.
- To exit the posture, exhale and bend your elbows to slowly lower your hips and legs back to the ground. Flex and loosen your wrists. Uncross your legs, then recross them the opposite way and come back into the position.
- Another option for exiting this posture is to extend the legs either forward or backward in order to move directly into another asana.

ADJUSTMENTS

Arms—If the student's hands are placed too far away from the hips, balancing will be difficult and the shoulder joints will be unstable. Instruct the student to place the hands as close to the hips as possible before lifting. Also, students often collapse into the chest and hunch the shoulders into the ears. Remind them to keep the elbows straight and near the rib cage. To adjust, kneel behind the student and place your hands on the upper arms. Lightly rotate the upper arms externally and encourage the student to lengthen the spine.

Neck—Place your hands lightly on top of the student's shoulders to encourage length in the neck. Also remind the student to gaze forward, not down, while lifting the hips off the ground.

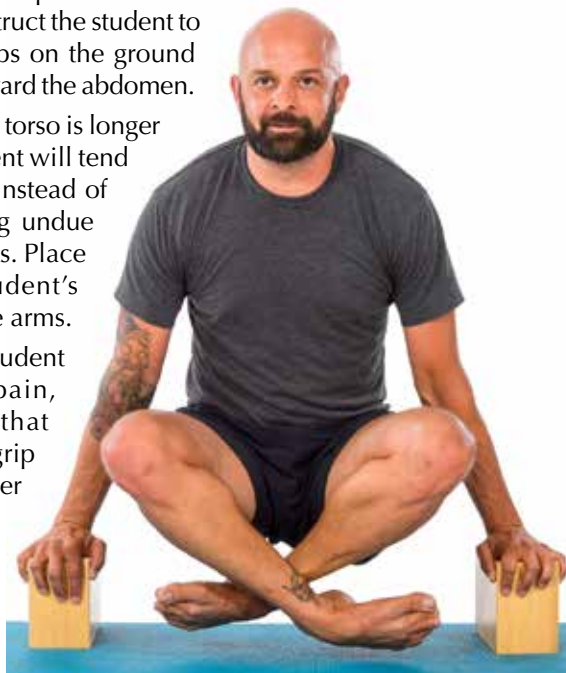
MODIFICATIONS

Arm strength—To help a student build strength in the arms and shoulders, cue to press through the arms and lift the hips while the legs remain on the ground. Place a folded blanket under the hips to shorten the distance to lift.

Abdominal strength—To help a student build abdominal strength, instruct the student to keep the palms and hips on the ground and then lift the legs toward the abdomen.

Long torso—If a student's torso is longer than the arms, the student will tend to lift from the fingers instead of the palms, thus placing undue stress on the finger joints. Place blocks under the student's hands to "lengthen" the arms.

Wrist weakness—If a student complains of wrist pain, props are available that allow the student to grip an elevated bar in order to lift, rather than bending the joint. Also, make certain to counter the hyperextension of the wrists with some gentle, easy wrist flexion.



Modification: long torso.



Modification: building abdominal strength.

KINEMATICS

Tolasana is not a pure seated posture; it is generally considered an arm-balancing asana. However, it is a good transitional posture in the seated category. It can also build strength in the arms, abdominals, and legs—even if the legs are not lifted off the ground. It is a pose that requires coordinated strength and attention throughout the entire body.

Tolasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (I)
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis (C, I)
Thigh	Knee flexion	Hamstrings (C, I)
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion, stability	Iliopsoas (C, I)
	External rotation, stability	Adductors (E, I)
	Flexion, external rotation	Sartorius (C, I)
	Hip stability	Deep external rotators,* gluteus medius (I)
	Pelvic stability	Rectus abdominis, quadratus lumborum (I)
Torso	Flexion	Rectus abdominis (C, I)
	Rib and chest elevation	Pectoralis minor (C, I)
	Trunk stability	Internal and external obliques, rectus abdominis, transverse abdominis (C, I)
Shoulder	External rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids and mid trapezius (C, I)
	Scapular depression, stability	Serratus anterior (C, I)
	Postural support in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)
	Humerus hyperextension, stability	Latissimus dorsi, posterior deltoids (C, I)
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)
	Elbow stability	Biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (I)
Lower arm	Forearm pronation, stability	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)
	Wrist hyperextension, stability, and balance	Wrist flexors and extensors (C, I)
Hand and fingers	Finger abduction	Abductor digiti minimi, interossei (C, I)
	Finger stability, balance	Flexor digitorum profundus and superficialis, flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei palmaris (C, I)
Neck	Neck extension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, semispinalis, upper trapezius (C, I)

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

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

Hanumanasana



Forward-Split Pose

[huh-noo-maahn-AAH-suh-nuh]

In Hindu mythology, Hanuman was a powerful god of service and the son of Vayu, the god of wind or breath. He is a magical monkey characterized by both mental and physical strength. The epitome of service, he helped rescue Sita, the wife of Lord Rama by making great flying leaps across the seas to fulfill his duty.

DESCRIPTION

This asana is a tribute to Hanuman's giant leap—a forward split. Hanumanasana is another posture that many students may find quite challenging when they first try it. With practice, however, it provides very beneficial flexibility in the hamstrings and hip flexors. When one is able to practice Hanumanasana comfortably, the pose can be deepened by a slight backbend.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

First chakra (Muladhara) grounding energy, second chakra (Svadhishthana) creative energy, fourth chakra (Anahata) heart-opening energy, seventh chakra (Sahasrara) divine energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the sit bone of the forward leg and the top of the thigh of the back leg. Anchor into the back of the heel of the forward leg and the top of the foot and thigh of the back leg. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both legs.

BENEFITS

- Stretches the hamstrings and hip flexors.
- Stabilizes and balances the deep hip muscles.
- Helps relieve sciatica pain.
- Strengthens the spinal and abdominal muscles.

⚠ CAUTION

Hamstring or groin injury—Proceed with modifications.

VERBAL CUES

- Begin in a kneeling lunge (a position in the classical Sun Salutation) with your right leg forward. Slide your left leg back and lower your front thigh toward the ground. Your hands remain on the ground.
- Square your shoulders so that they align directly over your pelvis. Inhale and move your pelvis toward your right heel and lift your rib cage so that your spine is as long as possible.



Preparation for Hanumanasana.

- Breathe deeply into any area in which you feel resistance and relax, or back away slightly. Gaze softly forward.
- Secure your hands on the ground as you slowly slide your right heel forward. Exhale and straighten your right leg as much as is comfortable. Go to the first point of resistance and breathe here. Your pelvis should remain in a fairly neutral position.
- Find the place where you feel balanced between your legs and remain there as you breathe deeply. Allow your muscles to relax with each exhalation. Lift your rib cage away from your hips as you inhale.
- If you can do so comfortably and without strain, lower your hips all the way to the ground. Inhale and raise your arms overhead if you feel grounded in the hips. Stay here and soften your breath.
- If you cannot bring your hips to the ground comfortably, focus on keeping your hips and shoulders in alignment.
- To exit this posture, use your arms and abdominal muscles to eliminate the possibility of straining your low back or groin. Move slowly and press your hands into the ground while lifting your hips. Bend your right knee and move your body back into the lunge. Switch legs and prepare to practice on the opposite side.

ADJUSTMENTS

Hips—If a student's hips are out of alignment where the front hip rotates forward, squat or kneel to the side of the forward leg and place your hands on the sides of the pelvis. Very gently draw the front of the flexed hip back and press the back of the extended hip forward.

Balance—If a student has difficulty balancing in the posture with the arms overhead, stand to the student's side and lightly hold onto the arms as a means of support.



Adjustment: balance.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hamstrings or hip flexors—If either of these muscle groups is tight, the student will be unable to comfortably lower the hips to the ground, and may require blankets under the hips or back knee for more support. Another modification is to place blocks under the student's hands to keep the upper body weight from overly stretching the hamstrings and hip flexors. Cue the student to keep the shoulders relaxed.

Knee discomfort—For some students, the pressure of the back knee against the ground creates discomfort; to alleviate it, place padding under the knee.



Modification: tight hamstrings or hip flexors.

KINEMATICS

As with Padmasana (Lotus Pose), some people can come into this posture naturally and with ease, but most need to practice modified versions as they increase the range of motion in the joints and flexibility in the hamstrings and hip flexors.

Hanumanasana (Right Leg Forward)

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (C, I)	
Lower leg (R)	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)	Gastrocnemius, soleus
Lower leg (L)	Ankle plantar flexion	Gastrocnemius, soleus (I)	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus
Thigh	Knee extension	Quadriceps	
Hip and pelvis (R)	Hip flexion	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris (C, I, R)	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis (L)	Hip hyperextension	Hamstrings, gluteus maximus (C, I)	Iliopsoas, rectus femoris
Torso	Slight lumbar hyperextension	Rectus abdominis (E, I)	Rectus abdominis
	Slight lumbar hyperextension, spinal stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)	
	Trunk stability	Transverse abdominis, internal and external obliques (I)	
Shoulder	Humeral flexion	Anterior deltoids, pectoralis major, biceps brachii (C, I)	Latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior
	External rotation	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior tibialis (C, I)	
	Scapular adduction	Rhomboids, mid trapezius (C, I)	
Upper arm	Elbow extension	Triceps brachii (C, I)	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis
Lower arm	Forearm supination	Supinator (C, I)	
	Forearm 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, upper trapezius (I)	

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



Bakasana

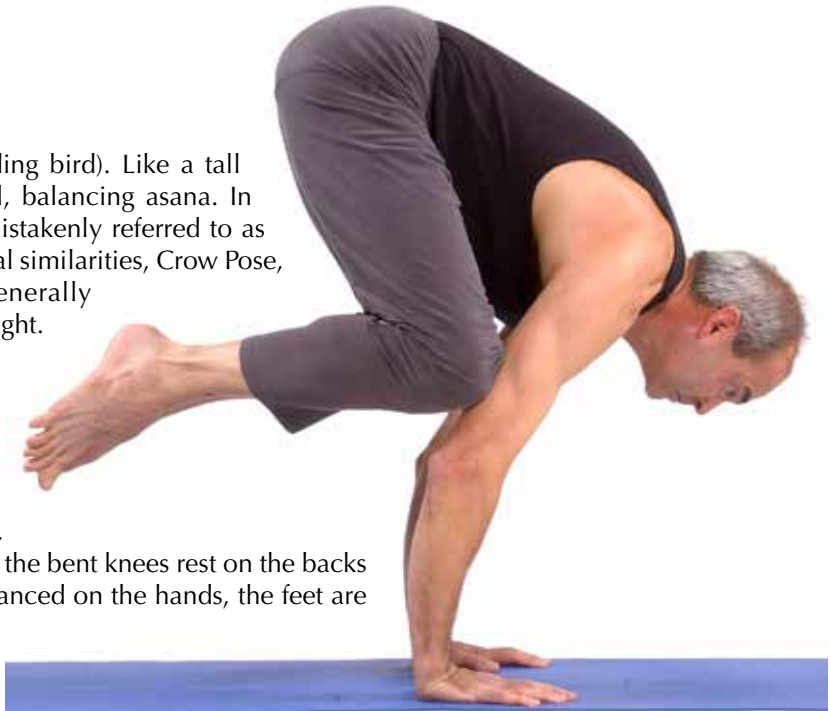
Crane Pose

[buhk-AAH-suh-nuh]

Baka is Sanskrit for “crane” (the tall wading bird). Like a tall and poised crane, Bakasana is a graceful, balancing asana. In some yoga traditions, this pose is often mistakenly referred to as Crow Pose. However, despite some physical similarities, Crow Pose, or Kakasana (KAH-KAH-suh-nuh), is generally practiced with the elbows completely straight.

DESCRIPTION

Like Tolasana (Scale Pose), Bakasana is most often categorized as an arm balance but is frequently used as a transitional seated pose. In this squatting arm balance, the arms support the weight of the body as the bent knees rest on the backs of the upper arms. Once the person is balanced on the hands, the feet are lifted off the ground. Many students are naturally somewhat fearful of falling forward onto the face when they first practice this asana.



ENERGETIC FOCUS

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

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the metacarpal heads and fingertips in both hands. Anchor the front of the knees (or shins) into the backs of the upper arms. Evenly balance the grounding energy in both hands.

BENEFITS

- Strengthens the arms and wrists.
- Improves focus and balance.
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles.
- Stretches the low back.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Wrist injury or acute carpal tunnel syndrome—Students with wrist concerns should refrain from practicing this posture.

Pregnancy—This posture is not recommended after the second trimester.

VERBAL CUES

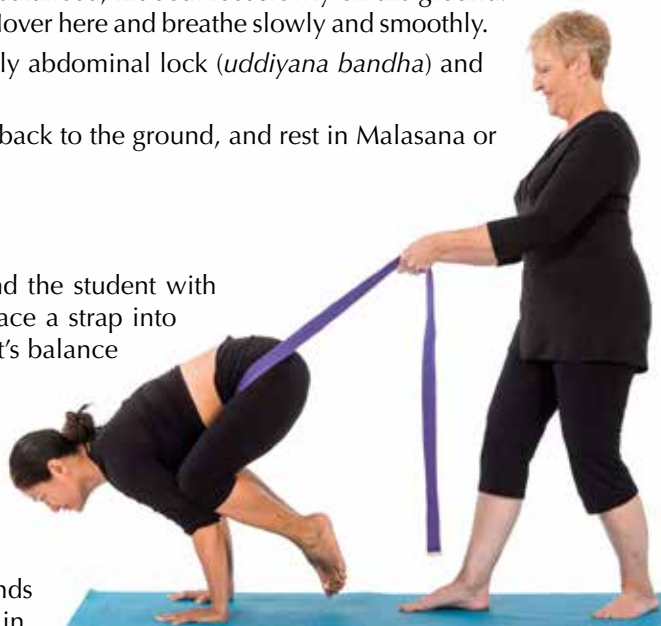
- From Malasana (Basic Squat, or Bead Pose), place your hands shoulder-width apart on the ground in front of you.
- Fix your gaze on a *drishti* (focal point) slightly forward of your hands. Spread your fingers apart to create a wider base of support and anchor into your fingertips.
- Lean forward slightly and feel your body weight shift toward your fingers. Engage your inner thigh muscles (adductors) to draw attention to your lower abdominal region. On an exhalation, firm the abdominal muscles.
- Bend your elbows and slowly lift your heels off the ground as you shift your body weight more toward your hands. Continue to gaze forward toward your *drishti*. Feel your hips lift upward.
- Press your knees or shins against the backs of your upper arms with your knees as close to your underarms (axillas) as possible. Notice your balance center and imagine your breath moving into and out of this mid-abdominal space.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- As you lean forward, exhale and slowly lift one foot off the ground. If you do not feel comfortably balanced, slowly lower that foot and lift the other. If you feel balanced, lift both feet slowly off the ground. Spread the toes to keep the entire body energized. Hover here and breathe slowly and smoothly.
- Continue to focus your gaze past your hands. Apply abdominal lock (*uddiyana bandha*) and continue to balance for five or six breaths.
- To exit the posture, exhale, slowly lower your feet back to the ground, and rest in Malasana or transition into another pose.

ADJUSTMENTS

Aiding balance—Squat or stand in a slight lunge behind the student with your hands on the outsides of the hips; alternately, place a strap into the creases of the student's hips. Lightly aid the student's balance without holding the student up with your strength.

Hands—Remind the student to place the hands no more than shoulder-width apart and to press the hands firmly into the ground. If the student's fingers are not spread, lightly touch the top of the hand to encourage expansion.

Elbows—Kneel beside the student and place your hands on the outsides of the upper arms to guide the elbows in toward the body.



Adjustment: aiding balance.

MODIFICATIONS

Confidence building—Some students feel much more confident and less fearful with folded blankets or a pillow positioned nearby so as to cushion any fall. Also, continue to remind them to keep the gaze forward of the hands. If a student does fall forward, remind her or him that continuing on after falling builds strength and character in all aspects of life!

Strength building—For students who have difficulty lifting both feet off the ground, place blocks or folded blankets under the feet so that they begin the pose with the hips in a slightly elevated position. Also, for those recovering from wrist injury, instruct them to practice putting body weight on the hands while keeping the feet on the ground.

KINEMATICS

Individuals with tight hips may lift the hips significantly higher than the head as they get into position and often lose balance more quickly. The more compact a student can make the body in this position, the easier it is to remain controlled and balanced. This is a very active posture, in which, once the person is in position, most of the muscles remain in isometric contraction to maintain balance.

Bakasana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles active
Foot and toes	Toe extension	Extensor digitorum and hallucis longus (C, I)
Lower leg	Ankle dorsiflexion	Anterior tibialis, extensor digitorum longus (C, I)
Thigh	Knee flexion, stability	Hamstrings, sartorius (C, I)
Hip and pelvis	Hip flexion, stability	Iliopsoas, sartorius, rectus femoris (C, I)
	Hip abduction, stability	Gluteus medius and minimus (C, I)
Torso	Spinal extension and stability	Erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (C, I)
	Sternoclavicular stability	Subclavius (I)
	Torso stability	Rectus abdominis, internal and external obliques, transverse abdominis (I)
Shoulder	Flexion of humerus, stability	Pectoralis major, coracobrachialis, anterior deltoid (C, I)
	Adduction of humerus, stability	Latissimus dorsi, teres major (C, I)
	Stability and external rotation of humerus	Infraspinatus, teres minor, posterior deltoid (C, I)
	Shoulder and scapular stability	Subscapularis, serratus anterior (C, I)
	Scapular stability	Rhomboids and mid trapezius (C, I)
	Supporting posture in mid back, downward pull of scapulae	Lower trapezius (C, I)
Upper arm	Elbow flexion, stability	Triceps brachii (E, I), biceps brachii, brachialis, brachioradialis (I)
Lower arm	Forearm pronation, stability	Pronator teres and quadratus (C, I)
	Wrist hyperextension, balance, and stability	Extensor carpi radialis brevis and longus, extensor carpi ulnaris (C, I), flexor carpi radialis and ulnaris, palmaris longus (E, I)
Hand and fingers	Finger abduction	Abductor digiti minimi, interossei (C, I)
	Finger extension, stability, balance	Flexor digitorum profundus and superficialis, flexor digiti minimi brevis, interossei palmaris (C, I)
Neck	Neck hyperextension and stability	Splenius capitis and cervicis, cervical erector spinae, semispinalis, upper trapezius (C, I)

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