

Yoga Poses | ASANAS | Benefits

Listed alphabetically

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)

One of the most widely recognized yoga poses, Downward-Facing Dog is an all-over, rejuvenating stretch.

Benefits

- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Energizes the body
- Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches, and hands
- Strengthens the arms and legs
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Relieves menstrual discomfort when done with head supported
- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Improves digestion
- Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain, and fatigue
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica, sinusitis



Contraindications/Cautions

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Diarrhea
- Pregnancy: not recommended to do this pose late-term.
- Pregnancy: heart burn, morning sickness (do Half Dog w/ hands on wall, torso horizontal)
- High blood pressure or headache: do Half Dog w/ hands on wall, torso horizontal.

Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)

This pose is a highly effective strengthener for the legs, ankles and feet. To see the half moon, squint your eyes and draw an imaginary half-circle from the raised top hand through the lifted foot to the standing foot and supporting hand.

In hatha yoga, the moon has a rich symbolic significance: the word hatha can be divided into its two constituent syllables, "ha" = Sun, and "tha" = Moon. The sun and the moon represent the two polar energies of the human body - the right nostril and right side of the body represents the Sun; the left side represents the Moon.



Benefits

- Strengthens the abdomen, ankles, thighs, buttocks, and spine
- Stretches the groins, hamstrings and calves, shoulders, chest, and spine
- Improves coordination and sense of balance
- Helps relieve stress
- Improves digestion

Contraindications/Cautions

- If you have any neck problems, don't turn your head to look upward; continue looking straight ahead and keep both sides of the neck evenly long.
- Headache or migraine
- Low blood pressure
- Diarrhea
- Insomnia

Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)

Named after a legendary teacher of yoga, this twist energizes the spine and stimulates the digestive fire.

Benefits

- Stimulates the liver and kidneys
- Stretches the shoulders, hips, and neck
- Energizes the spine
- Stimulates the digestive fire in the belly
- Relieves menstrual discomfort, fatigue, sciatica, and backache
- Therapeutic for asthma and infertility
- Traditional texts say that Ardha Matsyendrasana increases appetite, destroys most deadly diseases, and awakens kundalini.



Contraindications/Cautions

- Back or spine injury: Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher.

Anjali Mudra (Offering of the Heart - Salutation Seal)

Practicing Anjali Mudra is an excellent way to induce a meditative state of awareness. This gesture is known as the Reverence to the Heart Seal, or Reverence to the Self Seal.

Benefits

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Calms the brain
- Creates flexibility in the hands, fingers, wrists, and arms
- Opens the heart



Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)

Bound Angle Pose, also called Cobbler's Pose after the typical sitting position of Indian cobblers, is an excellent groin- and hip-opener.

Benefits

- Stimulates abdominal organs, ovaries and prostate gland, bladder, and kidneys
- Stimulates the heart and improves general circulation
- Stretches the inner thighs, groins, and knees
- Helps relieve mild depression, anxiety, and fatigue
- Soothes menstrual discomfort and sciatica
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Therapeutic for flat feet, high blood pressure, infertility, and asthma
- Consistent practice of this pose until late into pregnancy is said to help ease childbirth.
- Traditional texts say that Baddha Konasana destroys disease and gets rid of fatigue.



Contraindications/Cautions

- Groin or knee injury: Only perform this pose with blanket support under the outer thighs.

Bakasana (Crane or Crow Pose)

A compact arm balance that tones and strengthens the abdominal organs and arms.

(bahk-AHS-anna) baka = crane

Benefits

- Strengthens arms and wrists
- Stretches the upper back
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles
- Opens the groins
- Tones the abdominal organs



Contraindications/Cautions

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Pregnancy

Balāsana (Child's Pose)

Balāsana is a restful pose that can be sequenced between more challenging asanas.

Benefits

- Gently stretches the hips, thighs, and ankles
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and fatigue
- Relieves back and neck pain when done with head and torso supported



Contraindications/Cautions

- Diarrhea
- Pregnancy (Knees open)
- Knee injury: Avoid Balāsana unless you have the supervision of an experienced teacher.

Bhujangāsana (Cobra Pose)

This posture promotes flexibility in the spine and encourages the chest to open. An excellent pose to counter hours of sitting at the computer.

Benefits

- Strengthens the spine
- Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders, and abdomen
- Firms the buttocks
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Helps relieve stress and fatigue
- Opens the heart and lungs
- Soothes sciatica
- Therapeutic for asthma
- Traditional texts say that Bhujangāsana increases body heat, destroys disease, and awakens kundalini.



Contraindications/Cautions

- Back injury
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Headache
- Pregnancy

Chaturanga Dandasana (4 Limb Staff Pose)

A challenging poses that tones and strengthens the abdominal organs and arms.

Benefits

- Strengthens abdominal muscles, arms, shoulders, upper back and wrists
- Tones the abdominal organs

Contraindications/Cautions

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Pregnancy



Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)

So named because it looks like an archer's bow, the torso and legs representing the body of the bow, and the arms the string.

Benefits

- Stretches the entire front of the body, ankles, thighs and groins, abdomen and chest, and throat, and deep hip flexors (psoas)
- Strengthens the back muscles
- Improves posture
- Stimulates the organs of the abdomen and neck



Contraindications/Cautions

- High or low blood pressure
- Migraine
- Insomnia
- Serious lower-back or neck injury

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (Mermaid Pose - variation of One-Legged King Pigeon)

The full Eka Pada Rajakapotasana is a deep backbend that puffs the chest, making a yogi resemble a pigeon (see pose third from left on top border of web page). There are preparatory variations, such as Prone One-Legged Pigeon with the hands or forearms on the floor; and the variation shown left with the back foot inside the elbow, and the hands clasped behind the head.

Benefits

- Stretches the thighs, groins and psoas, abdomen, chest and shoulders, and neck
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Opens the shoulders and chest



Contraindications

- Sacroiliac injury
- Ankle, Knee injury
- Tight hips or thighs

Garudasana (Eagle Pose)

For Garudasana you need strength, flexibility, and endurance, but also unwavering concentration that actually calms the fluctuations (vrtti) of consciousness. This is true of all the yoga poses, but it's a bit more obvious in pretzel-like Eagle.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the ankles and calves
- Stretches the thighs, hips, shoulders, and upper back
- Improves concentration, sense of balance

Contraindications/Cautions

- Students with knee injuries should avoid this pose, or perform with the leg slightly crossed over, with the foot in contact with the floor, in a mild squat with knees partially bent.



Janu Sirsasana (Head-to-Knee Pose)

A forward bend for all levels of students, Janu Sirsasana is also a spinal twist.

Benefits

- Calms the brain and helps relieve mild depression
- Stretches the spine, shoulders, hamstrings, and groins
- Stimulates the liver and kidneys
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Relieves anxiety, fatigue, headache, menstrual discomfort
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, insomnia, and sinusitis
- Strengthens the back muscles during pregnancy (up to second trimester), done without coming forward, keeping your back spine concave and front torso long.



Contraindications/Cautions

- Asthma - Diarrhea
- Knee injury: Don't flex the injured knee completely and support it on a folded blanket.

Natarajasana (Lord of the Dance Pose)

Also called the Cosmic Dancer, Nataraja is another name for Shiva. His dance symbolizes cosmic energy in its "five actions:" creation, maintenance, and destruction or re-absorption of the world, concealment of authentic being, and salvific grace.

Benefits

- Stretches the shoulders and chest; Stretches the thighs, groins, and abdomen
- Strengthens the legs and ankles
- Improves balance



Contraindications

- High or low blood pressure
- Serious lower-back or knee injury

Paschimottasana (Seated Forward Bend)

Literally translated as "intense stretch of the west," (in Surya Namascara - Sun Salutation we face the sun, which rises in the east; therefore the front of the body is the eastern side, and the back of the body is the western side.)



Benefits

- Paschimottanasana helps the distracted mind unwind
- This is a cooling pose that balances the effects of summer heat
- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stretches the muscles along the spine, the lumbar spine, shoulders, hamstrings
- Stimulates the liver, pancreas, kidneys, ovaries, and uterus
- Improves digestion and elimination
- Helps relieve menopausal symptoms and menstrual discomfort, and infertility
- Soothes headaches, anxiety and reduces stress
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, insomnia, and sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions

- Asthma
- Diarrhea
- Back injury: Only perform this pose under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

Step by Step

1. Sit your buttocks directly on the floor, or supported on a folded blanket, with your legs straight in front of you. Flex your feet and reach through the balls of your feet, as if they are pressing against an imaginary wall and spread your toes. Rock onto your left buttock, and manually rotate your upper right thigh so the inner thigh rolls down towards the floor, and the flesh and muscles from underneath are pulled out and up. Repeat on the other side. Now pull each of your buttock flesh/muscles back and out, opening the sitting bones. This will bring you more firmly in contact with your bones against the earth.
2. As you inhale, draw the inner groins deep into the pelvis, press your finger tips on the floor beside your hips, and lengthen the sides of your body from the hips to the shoulders. Keeping your pelvis in contact with the earth, hug your shoulder blades firmly in behind the heart and lift the heart and crown of the head.
3. As you exhale, keeping the front torso long, bend forward from the hip joints, not the waist. Lengthen and fold from the sacrum tipping forward. Walk your fingers forward and maintain a neutral spine and alignment of the entire torso, including the neck and head as much as possible. If you'd like to move deeper into the pose, take the sides of the feet with your hands, or hook your big toes with your first two fingers; if this isn't possible, loop a strap around the foot soles, and hold the strap firmly.
4. When you are ready to go further, don't forcefully pull yourself into the forward bend, whether your hands are on the floor, feet, big toes, or holding the strap. Always lengthen the front torso into the pose, keeping your head raised. If you are holding the feet, bend the elbows out to the sides and lift them away from the floor; if holding the strap, lighten your grip and walk the hands forward, keeping the arms long. The lower belly should touch the thighs first, then the upper belly, then the ribs, and the head last.
5. With each inhalation, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend. In this way the torso oscillates and lengthens almost imperceptibly with the breath. Eventually you may be able to stretch the arms out beyond the feet on the floor.
6. Stay in the pose anywhere from several breaths to several minutes. To come up, first lift the torso away from the thighs and straighten the elbows again if they are bent. Then inhale and lift the torso up by pulling the tailbone down and into the pelvis.

Modifications & Props

Beginners should sit up on a folded blanket in this pose, and hold a strap around the feet. Extremely stiff students can place a rolled up blanket under their knees.

Parighasana I & 2 (Gate Pose; second pose is Karen's variation: Heaven's Gate)

This pose is a great side stretch for the torso and hips, as well as an abdominal and core strengthener. The second variation is a pose I discovered and named Heaven's Gate because it such a blissfully amazing stretch! In the pose you can feel your heart and whole body opening up towards the sky, to divinity, and releasing tension from head to toe.

Benefits

- Strengthens the abdomen, hip flexors, and spine
- Stimulates the kidneys, thyroid and prostate glands, and intestines
- Helps relieve back ache and general stress and tension
- Improves digestion

Contraindications/Cautions

- Asthma - Diarrhea - Headache - Heart Problems - Insomnia - Low blood pressure - Menstruation - Pregnancy



Paripurna Navasana (Full Boat Pose)

An abdominal and deep hip flexor strengthener, Boat Pose requires you to balance on your sitting bones and tailbone.

Benefits

- Strengthens the abdomen, hip flexors, and spine
- Stimulates the kidneys, thyroid and prostate glands, and intestines
- Helps relieve stress
- Improves digestion



Contraindications/Cautions

- Asthma - Diarrhea - Headache - Heart Problems - Insomnia - Low blood pressure - Menstruation - Pregnancy
- Neck injury: Sit with your back near a wall to perform this pose. As you tilt your torso back rest the back of your head on the wall.

Parivrtta Parsvakonasana (Revolved Side Angle Pose)

Revolved Side Angle Pose is one of three revolved variations of standing poses, the other two being Revolved Triangle Pose and Revolved Half Moon Pose. Maintain, as much as possible, contact with your back heel down in this pose.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the legs, knees, and ankles
- Stretches the groins, spine, chest and lungs, and shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases stamina
- Improves digestion and aids elimination
- Improves balance

Contraindications/Cautions

- Headache - High or low blood pressure - Insomnia



Parivrtta Supta Padangusthasana (Revolved Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Usually sequenced just after Supta Padangusthasana. Both are ideal after back bends - realign spine and pelvis - and as preparation for Savasana.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the legs
- Stretches the hips and spine
- Relieves mild back pain
- Stimulates the abdominal organs



Contraindications

- Back or spine injury. Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher or avoid it altogether. Also avoid this pose if you have:
- Low blood pressure - Migraine - Diarrhea - Headache - Insomnia

Parivrtta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)

Parivrtta Trikonasana is usually sequenced just after (as a counterpose to) Trikonasana. You can also use this pose as a standing preparation for seated forward bends and twists.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the legs
- Stretches the hips and spine
- Opens the chest to improve breathing
- Relieves mild back pain
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Improves sense of balance



Contraindications

- Back or spine injury. Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher or avoid it altogether.
- Also avoid this pose if you have: Low blood pressure - Migraine - Diarrhea - Headache - Insomnia

Parivrtta Virabhadrasana II (Revolved Warrior II Pose - Rainbow Warrior)

This variation of the fierce warrior increases core strength and stamina.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches back, spine, the legs and ankles
- Stretches the groins, chest and lungs, shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases stamina
- Relieves backaches, especially through second trimester of pregnancy
- Therapeutic for carpal tunnel syndrome, flat feet, infertility, osteoporosis, and sciatica



Contraindications/Cautions

- Diarrhea
- High blood pressure
- Neck problems: Don't turn your head to look up at the top hand; continue to look straight ahead with both sides of the neck lengthened evenly, neck aligned in neutral.

Phalankasana (Plank Pose)

Also called "Push Up" position, this pose tones and strengthens the abdominal muscles and arms.



Benefits

- Strengthens abdominal muscles, arms, shoulders, upper back and wrists
- Tones the abdominal organs

Contraindications/Cautions

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Pregnancy 2nd and 3rd trimester (place knees on floor)

Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Forward Bend)

This standing pose as described here is technically known as Prasarita Padottanasana I - in the Iyengar, Anusara and Ashtanga systems.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the inner and back legs and the spine
- Tones the abdominal organs
- Calms the brain
- Relieves mild backache

Contraindications

- Lower-back problems: Avoid the full forward bend

Salabhasana (Locust Pose)

Locust Pose is an effective means for strengthening the back of the torso, legs, and arms in preparation for the deeper backbends.

Grouped among the so-called "baby backbends" which includes Dhanurasana (Bow Pose), like other seemingly simple poses, is actually a lot more challenging and effective than it appears.

Benefits

- Strengthens the muscles of the spine, buttocks, and backs of the arms and legs
- Stretches the shoulders, chest, belly, and thighs
- Improves posture
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Helps relieve stress



Contraindications/Cautions

- Headache - Serious back injury - Students with neck injuries should keep their head in a neutral position by looking down at the floor; they might also support the forehead on a thickly folded blanket.

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)

This active version of Bridge Pose calms the brain and rejuvenates tired legs.

Benefits

- Stretches the chest, neck, and spine
- Calms the brain and helps alleviate stress and mild depression



- Stimulates abdominal organs, lungs, and thyroid
- Rejuvenates tired legs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Relieves menstrual discomfort when done supported
- Reduces anxiety, fatigue, backache, headache, and insomnia
- Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

Contraindications/Cautions

- Neck injury: avoid this pose unless you are practicing under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)

Supta Padangusthasana provides relief from backache and stretches the hips, hamstrings, and calves.



Benefits

- Stretches hips, thighs, hamstrings, groins, and calves
- Strengthens the knees
- Stimulates the prostate gland
- Improves digestion
- Relieves backache, sciatica, and menstrual discomfort
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, flat feet, and infertility

Contraindications/Cautions

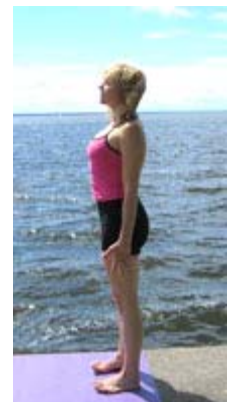
- Diarrhea - Headache - High blood pressure: Raise your head and neck on a folded blanket.

Tadasana (Mountain Pose)

(tah-DAHS-anna)
tada = mountain

Tadasana is the most basic posture, and perhaps the most important, as it serves as the foundation for all the postures in the practice of Hatha Yoga. Once you understand the principles of alignment in Tadasana, we can apply these techniques to all poses. In a sequence, Tadasana can be practiced as a starting position for standing poses, as a pause for centering between standing poses, or on its own, to gain greater awareness of musculo-skeletal alignment, and to improve posture in general.

Tadasana can be practiced as a starting position for standing poses, in between standing poses, or by itself to improve posture.



Benefits

- Therapeutic for aligning and centering entire body
- Improves posture and proprioception
- Strengthens joints and muscles of feet and legs
- Tones pelvis, abdomen and buttocks
- Relieves sciatica
- Reduces flat feet, plantar fasciitis, heel spurs

Contraindications

- Headache - Insomnia - Low blood pressure, dizziness

Step by Step

1. Come into the pose gradually, mirroring our biological evolution from fetus/embryo to standing upright: begin in child's pose. Place your hands on the floor beside your head to help you lift up, tuck your toes under, and gently lift your torso, coming into a squatting position. Lower your heels toward the floor, and as you begin to stand your weight on your feet, coming into Uttanasana (standing forward bend), pause; place your two fists side-by-side, thumbs touching each other, between your feet near the arch close to the heels, and place the inner edges of your feet against your fists. This will space your feet so that they are hip width apart; with the ASIS bones, mid ankles, and second toes aligned parallel.
2. From forward bend, place your hands on your hips, and lift your elbows and the head of the arm bones up, away from the earth, drawing the shoulder blades firmly onto the back. Keeping that, and as you inhale fully into your back body, lengthen your side body, from your hips to your arm pits, and come all the way up into standing. Release your arms to rest by your sides.
3. Lift and spread your toes, keeping the balls of the feet grounded. Rock slightly back and forth and side to side; and feel the four corners of your feet evenly weighted on the floor, with the center of your weight in front of the ankles. Keep your toes lifted to help activate your arches and firm your leg muscles; hug your muscles to the bones on all sides, lifting the knee caps and thighs. (Do not clench the buttocks or harden your lower belly).
4. Inhale and take your thigh bones and pubic bone back, deepening your groins (take your buttocks back a little) - this opens the pelvic floor. As you exhale, scoop your tailbone towards your pubic bone, bringing your pelvis into neutral (pubic bone and navel vertically aligned) - notice how this action tones the pelvic floor. Firm your navel up and back towards your spine, and lift and lengthen your torso.
5. Inhale and lift your heart and collar bones, and keeping your torso light, exhale and draw the shoulder blades down and in towards the spine, supporting the back of your heart.
6. Get a sense of how when you balance your weight evenly on the four corners of the feet, it helps align the four corners of the pelvis, rib cage (front of ribs are softening down while heart lifts), shoulders and skull; and how when you engage and lift the arches of your feet, it helps lift the pelvic floor, base of the heart, upper palate, and crown of your head. As you inhale, draw the sides of the throat back, lifting the base of the skull into an imaginary headrest, bringing the chin parallel with the floor. As you exhale allow the face to soften. The eyes gaze softly ahead, and the upper and lower eye lids should be vertically aligned.
7. Close your eyes and find your center: notice that your front body, back body, and sides are all hovering in space evenly, without leaning in one direction more than the other. Learn to "feel" balanced without reference to your surroundings.
8. In many Hatha Yoga traditions Tadasana is the starting position for all the standing poses. You may practice Tadasana - maintaining full natural breathing - as a pose in itself to strengthen your entire posture. Stay in the pose for 5 to 20 breaths.

Partnering

To help you align yourself in this standing position, have a friend/partner stand beside you and hold a plumb line (use a strap or string with a weight on the end) down your midline profile. Check that the center of your ear, the center of your shoulder joint, the center of your outer hip, knee and outer ankle bone are in one vertical line.

Upavistha Konasana (Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend)

Upavistha Konasana is a good preparation for most of the seated forward bends and twists. The wide-leg standing pose is a perfect preparation pose as it involves similar actions.



(oo-pah-VEESH-tah cone-AHS-anna)
upavistha = seated, sitting / kona = angle

Benefits

- Stretches the insides and backs of the legs
- Stimulates the abdominal organs
- Strengthens the spine
- Calms the brain
- Releases groins

Contraindications

- Lower-back injury: Sit up high on a block or folded blanket and do not bend forward beyond neutral spine - keeping your torso between vertical and 45 degrees bent forward.

Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose or Backbend)

This full backbend strengthens the arms, legs, abdomen, and spine, and gives a boost of energy.

Benefits

- Stretches the chest and lungs
- Strengthens the arms and wrists, legs, buttocks, abdomen, and spine
- Stimulates the thyroid and pituitary
- Increases energy and counteracts depression
- Therapeutic for asthma, back pain, infertility, and osteoporosis



Contraindications

- Back injury - Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Diarrhea
- Headache - Heart problems - High or low blood pressure

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward-Facing Dog)

Upward-Facing Dog will challenge you to lift and open your chest.

Benefits

- Improves posture
- Strengthens the spine, arms, wrists
- Stretches chest and lungs, shoulders, and abdomen
- Firms the buttocks
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Helps relieve mild depression, fatigue, and sciatica
- Therapeutic for asthma



Contraindications/Cautions

- Back injury - Carpal tunnel syndrome - Headache - Pregnancy

Ustrasana (Camel Pose)

Camel Pose is a transition between the simpler prone backbends like Dhanuranasa (Bow Pose) and the more challenging backbends like Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose). For this pose you can pad your knees and shins with a thickly folded blanket.



Benefits

- Stretches the entire front of the body, the ankles, thighs and groins
- Stretches the deep hip flexors (psoas)
- Abdomen and chest, and throat
- Strengthens back muscles
- Improves posture
- Stimulates the organs of the abdomen and neck

Contraindications

- High or low blood pressure - Migraine - Insomnia - Serious low back or neck injury

Utkatasana (Chair Pose)

Chair Pose clearly works the muscles of the arms and legs, but it also stimulates the diaphragm and heart.

Benefits

- Strengthens the ankles, thighs, calves, and spine
- Stretches shoulders and chest
- Stimulates the abdominal organs, diaphragm, and heart
- Reduces flat feet

Contraindications/Cautions

- Headache - Insomnia - Low blood pressure



Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Despite its name, which means "intense stretch" pose, Uttanasana will wake up your hamstrings and soothe your mind.

Benefits

- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Stimulates the liver and kidneys
- Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and hips
- Strengthens the thighs and knees
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause
- Reduces fatigue and anxiety
- Relieves headache and insomnia
- Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, infertility, osteoporosis, and sinusitis



Contraindications/Cautions

- Back injury: Do this pose with bent knees, or perform Ardha Uttanasana with your hands on the wall, legs perpendicular to your torso, and arms parallel to the floor.

Utthita Padangusthasana (Extended Big Toe Pose)

Utthita Padangusthasana is a challenging standing pose; for an easier variation use a strap, or beginners may hold onto their bent knee. Like the supine version of the pose, it provides relief from backache and stretches the hips, hamstrings, and calves.



Benefits

- Stretches hips, thighs, hamstrings, groins, and calves
- Strengthens the feet, ankles, knees, hips, spine
- Stimulates the prostate gland
- Improves digestion
- Relieves backache, sciatica, and menstrual discomfort
- Therapeutic for flat feet and infertility

Contraindications/Cautions

- High or low blood pressure
- Serious lower-back, knee, ankle, or foot injury

Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)

This pose creates a stretch along the top side of the body, from the back heel through the raised arm. What's often neglected is the need to match the stretch along the under-side of the torso. It might be better, then, to think of Utthita Parsvakonasana as the Extended Sides Angle Pose.



Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the legs, knees, and ankles
- Stretches the groins, spine, waist, chest and lungs, and shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases stamina

Contraindications/Cautions

- Headache
- High or low blood pressure
- Insomnia

Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)

Triangle Pose is an essential standing pose in many styles of Hatha yoga.

Benefits

- Strengthens the thighs, knees, and ankles, hands and shoulders
- Stretches the hips, groins, hamstrings, and calves; shoulders, chest, and spine
- Stimulates and improves digestion, including abdominal and pelvic organs
- A balanced, neutral pose for all Dosha types
- Helps relieve the symptoms of PMS and menopause
- Relieves backache, especially through second trimester of pregnancy
- Therapeutic for anxiety (helps relieve stress), flat feet, infertility, neck pain, osteoporosis, and sciatica



Contraindications/Cautions

- Diarrhea
- Headache
- Heart Condition: Practice with your back against a wall; and rest the top hand on the hip, instead of reaching to the sky.
High blood pressure: Keep the gaze downward in the final pose.
- Low blood pressure: keep your supporting hand on a block instead of the floor to keep the heart and head elevated; and come out of the pose on an inhale, slowly.

Neck problems: Don't turn your head to look upward; look straight ahead keeping both the sides of the neck long.

Step by Step

1. From Adho Mukha Svanasana/Downward Dog, lunge your right foot forward between your hands, so the toes are on the same line as your finger tips . Turn your left/back heel down, keeping the same lunge distance between your feet. Align your right/front heel with the arch of the left/back foot. Turn your left foot in slightly, so the heel is 10 to 15 degrees behind the baby toe.
2. Place your right fingertips/hand on the floor, or on a block (see Beginners Modifications & Props below), so the tips of the fingers line up where the back of the heel ends = directly under your right shoulder. Place your left hand on your left hip.
3. Inhale, and firm your muscles to the bones on all sides of the legs. Rotate your inner thighs back, taking your hips out to the right and opening the pelvic floor; as you exhale scoop your tailbone in towards the left/back heel, bringing your hips along the same plane as the mid-line of the feet. Align your right/front leg so that the center of the right knee cap is in line with the center of the right ankle.
4. Extend your left arm directly up over your left shoulder, fingers open, so the left thumb is above your jaw line. Align the torso directly over the plane of the right leg. Anchor the left leg into the floor; and micro-bend the right/front knee, so the joint is not locked. Rotate the torso to the left, keeping both sides of the torso equally long.
5. Lengthen the sides of the throat back gently like you are leaning into an imaginary head rest, and then leading with the right eye, gently turn your head to look up to the left hand, eyes gazing softly at the left thumb.
6. Stay in the pose for 3 to 10 breaths.
7. To switch sides, bring your hands to the floor and step back with your right foot into downward dog. You may stay in downward dog for a few breaths, and notice the difference between how the two sides of the body feels; or go into Child Pose to rest between sides. You may also do a Vinyasa. From Downward Dog, lunge forward with the left leg and repeat the pose on this side. Optional transition: Keep the feet planted and inhale lift the torso up leading with the top arm up; switch the feet towards to opposite direction and repeat for the same amount of breaths on the left.

Deepen the Pose

Lift the toes and root the four corners of the feet into the earth. As you inhale, hug the shins in drawing the feet towards each other and scoop your tailbone and navel in; lengthen the side body from the hips to the arm pits and rotate the chest towards the sky. As you exhale, firm your supporting hand into the earth and shine your energy out in all directions. Open your heart towards the sky and extend up through your top arm, and out of your fingertips like sun rays.

Beginners Modifications & Props

- For tight hips, align the front heel with the back heel, instead of with the arch.
- If it isn't comfortable to make full contact on the floor with all the fingertips of your bottom hand - while keeping the legs straight and spine aligned over the midline of the feet, with the shoulders stacked along this same plane - then place one or two blocks under the hand for support.
- Brace your back heel or the back of your torso against a wall to support and steadiness.

Variations

1. Place the top arm around your back and reach your fingers to clasp your inner thigh of the front leg.
2. Stretch the top arm in the same direction as the front foot is facing, bicep over the ear, arm parallel to the floor, palm facing down (similar arm position as Utthita Parsvakonasana).

Vasisthasana (Side Plank Pose)

This pose is a powerful arm and wrist strengthener and might also be called the One-Arm Balance. Here you're balanced on the same-side hand and outer foot, with your torso and legs aligned at a 45-degree angle with the floor.

The full version of Vasisthasana, as taught by BKS Iyengar, with the top leg raised perpendicular to the floor, is beyond the capacity of most beginners. The pose described here is a modified version suitable for all levels of students.

Vasistha = literally means "most excellent, best, richest." Vasistha is the name of several well-known sages in the yoga tradition.

Benefits

- Strengthens the arms, belly, and legs
- Stretches and strengthens the wrists
- Stretches the backs of the legs (in the full version described below)
- Improves sense of balance



Contraindications/Cautions:

- Students with serious wrist, elbow, or shoulder injuries should avoid this pose.

Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II Pose)

Named for a fierce warrior, an incarnation of Shiva, this version of Warrior Pose increases stamina.

Benefits

- Strengthens and stretches the legs and ankles
- Stretches the groins, chest and lungs, shoulders
- Stimulates abdominal organs
- Increases stamina
- Relieves backaches, especially through second trimester of pregnancy
- Therapeutic for carpal tunnel syndrome, flat feet, infertility, osteoporosis, and sciatica



Contraindications/Cautions

- Diarrhea
- High blood pressure
- Neck problems: Don't turn your head to look over the front hand; continue to look straight ahead with both sides of the neck lengthened evenly.

Virabhadrasana III (Warrior III Pose)

This pose may be entered into from Virabhadrasana I, or from Tadasana.

Benefits

- Strengthens the ankles and legs, shoulders and muscles of the back
- Tones the abdomen
- Improves balance and posture

Contraindications: high blood pressure



Virasana (Hero or Heroine Pose)

Hero or Heroine Pose is less intense than the Supta-Reclined variation above.

Benefits

- Stretches the thighs, knees, and ankles
- Strengthens the arches
- Relieves tired legs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menstrual pain



Contraindications/Cautions

- If you have any serious back, knee, or ankle problems, avoid this pose unless you have the assistance of an experienced instructor.

Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero/Heroine Pose Variation)

Reclining Hero or Heroine Pose intensifies the stretch in the thighs and ankles of its upright version (see below). It also creates new stretches in the front groins, the psoas muscles, and the deep hip flexors.

Caution: Supta Virasana, the reclining variation of Virasana, is an intermediate pose. If you cannot perform this pose with your buttocks resting relatively easily on the floor between your feet, sit on a block or folded blanket.

Benefits

- Stretches the abdomen, thighs and deep hip flexors (psoas), knees, and ankles
- Strengthens the arches
- Relieves tired legs
- Improves digestion
- Helps relieve the symptoms of menstrual pain



Contraindications/Cautions

- If you have any serious back, knee, or ankle problems, avoid this pose unless you have the assistance of an experienced instructor.

Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

Vrksasana clarifies just how challenging it can be to stand on one leg.

Benefits

- Strengthens thighs, calves, ankles, and spine
- Stretches the groins and inner thighs, chest and shoulders
- Improves sense of balance
- Relieves sciatica and reduces flat feet



Contraindications/Cautions

- Headache
- Insomnia
- Low blood pressure
- High blood pressure: Don't raise arms overhead

SEQUENCES FOR YOGA THERAPY

Back Care (Poses to Strengthen & Stretch the Back)

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)
Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)
Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)
Bharadvajasana I (Bharadvaja's Twist)
Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)
Garudasana (Eagle Pose)
Halasana (Plow Pose)
Marichyasana III (Marichi's Pose)
Matsyasana (Fish Pose)
Parivrtta Parsvakonasana (Revolved Side Angle Pose)
Parivrtta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)
Salabhasana (Locust Pose)
Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)
Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)
Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose, Backbend, or Wheel)
Ustrasana (Camel Pose)
Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)
Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose)
Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II Pose)

Insomnia (Calming Poses to Help You Unwind)

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)
Halasana (Plow Pose)
Janu Sirsasana (Head-to-Knee Forward Bend)
Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)
Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand)
Salamba Sirsasana (Supported Headstand)
Savasana (Corpse Pose)
Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)
Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)
Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Menopause (Yoga to Strengthen Your Bones and Relieve Symptoms)

(Article from Yoga Journal Online By Jaki Nett)

I asked a friend once how she handles hot flashes. The advice she gave me was to find the humor and go on with life. She said, "Child, I'm all dressed up and made up, thinking I'm looking fine, and I get a hot flash and my face washes down onto the front of my dress. What can I do? Gotta find the humor."

I deal with hot flashes by dressing in layers and carrying a fan. To handle night sweats I sleep in a cold bedroom and I also have a small fan on the floor next to my side of the bed that I turn on when I need direct, immediate cooling.

Each woman experiences menopause differently. Some do not have any symptoms, while others' experiences are textbook cases. Allow your symptoms to help guide your yoga practice. Viparita Karani (Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose) did wonders for me when in the throws of menopause. Sometimes I would find myself lost, not knowing where I wanted to be, what I wanted to do, or how I felt. I felt like I was standing in a big void knowing I had to make a decision, but could not choose. I would end up in Viparita Karani, and I always came out feeling grounded and with a sense of inner knowing about what to do next.

If you find that you are irritable, do standing poses to release some of that pent-up energy. When the "blahs" pull you down, practice supported forward bends like Janu Sirsasana (Head-to-Knee Forward Bend), Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend), Upavistha Konasana (Wide Angle Pose), and crossed-legs forward bends. When your heart needs a little lift, practice Bound Supta Baddha Konasana, supported Setu Bandha Sarvangasana, and supported Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana.

My teacher, Geeta Iyengar, has a set series of poses to soothe the symptoms accompanying menopause. Salamba Sirsasana (Headstand), Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand), and Halasana (Plow Pose) are invaluable for hormonal balance. If your balance and equilibrium are disturbed, practice these poses with the support of a bolster or blanket.

Finally, look at your life off the yoga mat to see if there is a correlation that increases or decreases hot flashes and night sweats. I noticed that when I was stressed my hot flashes would increase and intensify. When I would get upset or angry, I would start having hot flashes. Spicy foods, alcohol, and hot drinks would also bring on hot flashes. Rooms with poor circulation - hot flashes. Controlling myself from not speaking my mind - flash and sweat. I decided to stop putting oil on at bedtime. I dressed to accommodate the fluctuations of hot flashes and the chills that followed. I also took my friend's advice and found my humor. When a hot flash occurs I say "it's nature's way of giving me a second chance to have moist skin." After twelve years, my hot flashes and night sweats are getting less frequent. I am starting to miss them.

Jaki Nett is a certified Iyengar Yoga instructor in St. Helena, California, and a faculty member of the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco. She teaches public classes in the San Francisco Bay Area and leads workshops in the United States and Europe, including specialty workshops on female issues.

Menstruation (Poses to Relieve PMS Symptoms - partial source Yoga Journal)

Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog)
Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)
Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)
Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)*
Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)*
Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)*
Janu Sirsasana (Head-to-Knee Forward Bend)*
Marichyasana III (Marichi's Pose)*
Matsyasana (Fish Pose)
Padmasana (Lotus Pose) or Half Lotus*
Pasasana (Noose Pose)
Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)*
Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose)
Supta Padangusthasana (Reclining Big Toe Pose)*
Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)*
Ustrasana (Camel Pose)
Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose)

* Poses that Karen personally finds most effective,

Osteoporosis (Poses to Strengthen Our Bones)

(Article from Yoga Journal Online By Jaki Nett)

Osteoporosis occurs when there is a loss of calcium and mineral in the bones that weakens them, causing them to break more easily. Losing bone density is a natural part of the aging process. Peak bone density occurs during the twenties; in our thirties bone density starts to decline. The most common place of a fracture is a vertebrae in the spine, the second area is the hips, and thirdly, in the wrist.

Diet, weight-bearing exercise, and movement are prescribed for osteoporosis. Exercise cannot replace bone that's already been lost, but it can help maintain strength in the bones. Simple movement can bring softness and agility to the joints. Agility helps us to maintain balance to prevent falling as we age.

Seated postures do wonders for the hip joints because they require a wide range of movements, which increase mobility. Try Virasana (Hero Pose), Siddhasana (Adept's Pose), Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose), Janu Sirsasana (Head-to-Knee Forward Bend), Marichyasana III (Pose Dedicated to the Sage Marichi, III), Upavistha Konasana (Wide Angle Pose), and simple squatting.

To maintain the health of the spine, practice poses that demand the back muscles to contract and lift against the pull of gravity. Backbends do this, but start with the simpler, "baby" backbends. If the spine has developed kyphosis, that is, an excessive convex curvature of the upper spine (also known as a Dowager's Hump), deeper backbends like Ustrasana (Camel Pose), Dhanurasana (Bow Pose), and Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward-Facing Bow Pose) can be painful and even cause injury. Practice Salabhasana (Locust Pose) and Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) without the use of the arms (this requires more strength in the back) and Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Supported Bridge Pose) with the knees bent and feet flat on the floor.

Standing poses are extremely beneficial because they are weight bearing on the large bones of the legs and hips and they promote flexibility. Let's take a look at Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend). This pose is weight bearing on the legs and feet, arms, wrists, and hands. It also encourages mobility in the hips and a concavity to the spine, rather than the convex, hump shape.

From Tadasana (Mountain Pose), step the legs and feet wide apart. Separate the heels wider than the toes and place the hands on the hips. Spread the soles of the feet and straighten the legs by lifting the kneecaps. Balance the pelvis on the hip joints. Inhale and concentrate on lifting the upper back as you arch the spine into extension. As you exhale keep the spine extended and fold forward, moving from the hip joint. Stop when the pelvis and the spine are at a right angle to the floor.

Release the arms and place the hands flat on the floor or on blocks. Place the hands directly under the shoulders so that the arms are perpendicular to the floor. Balance the weight evenly between the feet and legs, and the arms and hands, like a table on sturdy legs. Keeping this stability, take the spine deep into the body and look up. As you do, notice how evenly the muscles of the back body can contract. Notice the hard-to-move places and easy-to-move places. Hold and observe. Return to Tadasana on an inhalation.

Use caution when moving in and out of poses. When we are young our bones are stronger and can withstand sudden movements and even strong pounding (like jumping in and out of poses in Ashtanga practice). But with osteoporosis, this can cause fractures or, at the very least, increase pain.

As we grow older and our bodies change, so should our relationship to our yoga practice change. Let that relationship allow you to approach your yoga with knowledge, gentleness, and acceptance.