

A silhouette of a person in a yoga pose, standing on a dark, rocky surface. The person's arms are raised, with hands clasped together above their head. The background is a vibrant sunset or sunrise, with a gradient of colors from orange to pink and blue. The person is standing on one leg, with the other leg bent and the foot resting on the thigh.

# Yoga Handbook

**Teaching Yoga's Fundamental  
Foundations and Techniques - A  
Different look at Yoga Poses**

# **Yoga Handbook**

## **Teaching Yoga's Fundamental Foundations and Techniques - A Different Look at Yoga Poses**

Copyright © 2021

All rights reserved.

### **DEDICATION**

The author and publisher have provided this e-book to you for your personal use only. You may not make this e-book publicly available in any way. Copyright infringement is against the law. If you believe the copy of this e-book you are reading infringes on the author's copyright, please notify the publisher at: <https://us.macmillan.com/piracy>

# Contents

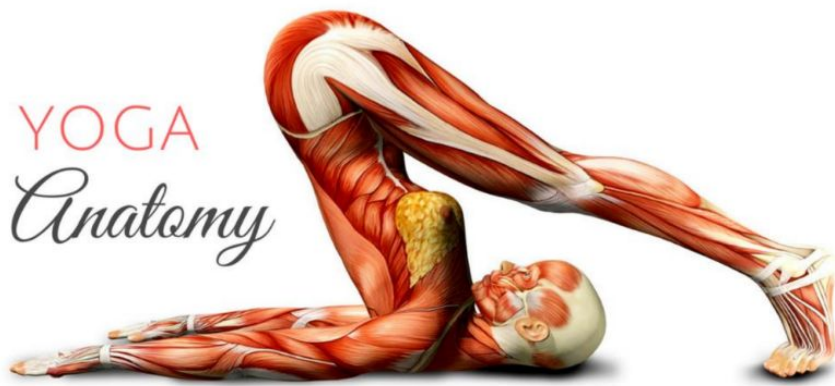
<i>Acknowledge.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chair Pose / Powerful Pose .....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Extended Side Angle Pose .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Cow Face Pose .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Pigeon Pose.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Camel Pose.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Frog pose .....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Half Lord Of The Fishes Pose .....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Headstand Pose .....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Hero Pose.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Dancer's Pose.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Four Limbed Staff Pose .....</i>	<i>52</i>

<i>Reverse Table Top Pose .....</i>	<b>57</b>
<i>Side Crow Pose.....</i>	<b>61</b>
<i>Revolved Side Angle Pose .....</i>	<b>66</b>
<i>Peacock Pose .....</i>	<b>71</b>
<i>Garland Pose.....</i>	<b>75</b>

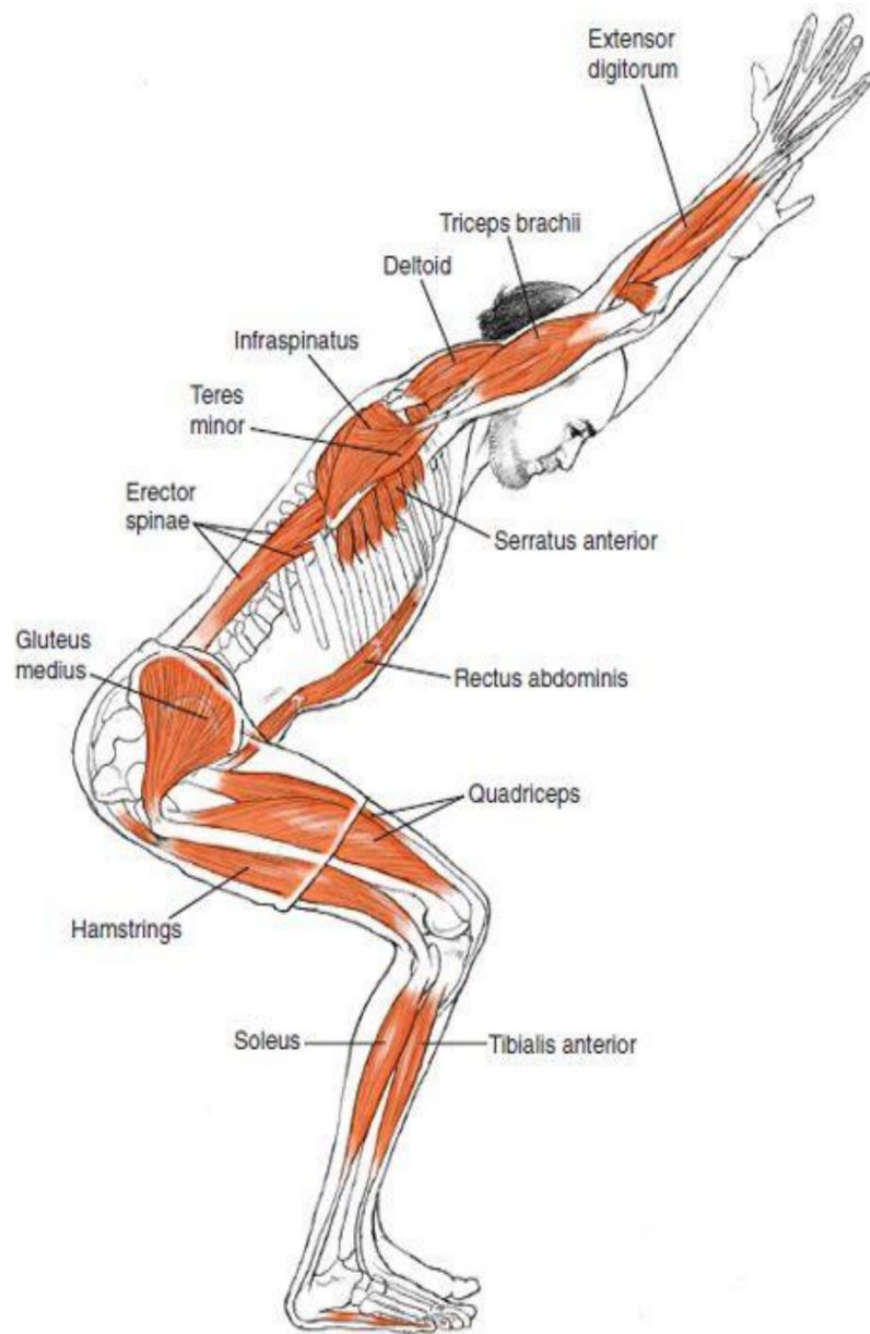


## Acknowledge

### Poses by Anatomy



You don't need to know the names of all the muscles and bones to practice yoga but being familiar with some basic terms can help. If you don't have a background in anatomy (or if your memory just isn't what it used to be) this guide is your starting point.



## *Chair Pose / Powerful Pose*

### **Step by step**

- From Mountain pose / Tadasana
- Exhale as you bend your knees and move your hips back as if you were sitting down on a chair. Draw your lower abdomen in and up to support your lower back
- Send your hips back rather than your knees forward, so that you can still see your toes
- Inhale as you raise your arms up around your ears and soften your shoulders
- Keep reaching higher, while sitting lower for 5 to 10 breaths
- To come back into in Tadasana, exhale, as you press your feet down to straighten your legs and then bring your arms down to your sides.

### **Beginners tips**

- Think about squeezing your legs together as if they are one to make them stronger. You can use a block or rolled up towel to practice this - imagine



you are squeezing it and also trying to shoot it out behind you as you internally rotate the thighs

- However, you can also bring your feet wider apart to make your base a little more stable if you need to
- Press firmly through the feet to create more lift in the upper body. Keep the weight evenly distributed between the heels and the balls of the feet
- Practice the action in the legs first with your hands on your hips or the back of a (stable) chair for support.

### **Benefits**

- Strengthens and stabilises the legs, ankles and feet
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles and lower back
- Opens and stretches the chest and shoulders
- Improves confidence and focus
- Utkatasana is a great pose in which to practise Mula Bandha and Uddiyana Bandha which will create lightness and also tone the pelvic floor muscles and lower abdomen.

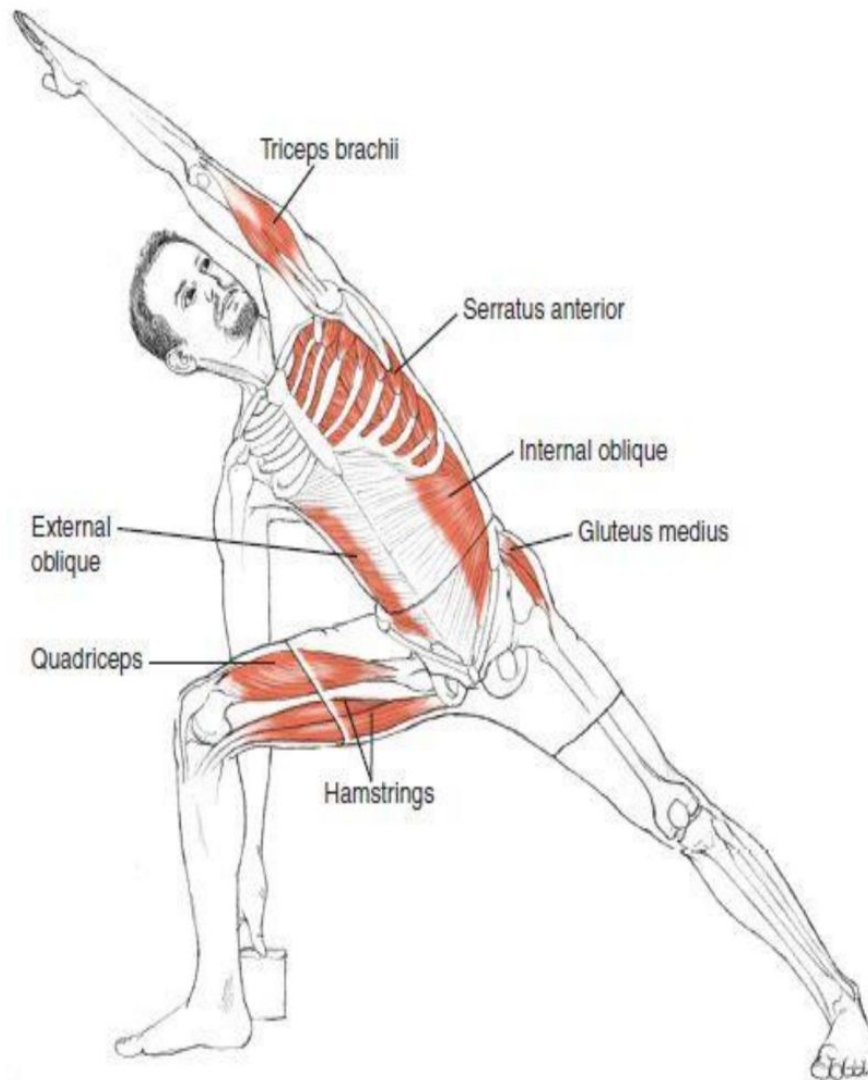
**Watch out for**

- Protect your knees: Double check that they don't come forward over the line of the toes. You should be able to see the toes.
- If you have discomfort in your shoulders or neck, bring your arms wider apart and/or lower. They can be pointing straight out in front of you or down to the floor. Alternatively you could bend the elbows and point the fingertips upwards.
- Make sure your lower belly is drawn back to the spine to protect your lower back. Try not to overarch the lumbar spine.

**Variations**

- Bring your legs together and squeeze them into each other if you want to work on your leg strength - you can also squeeze a block or towel if it's more comfortable
- Practise the pose with your feet hip-width apart or wider to create a more stable base, this is also a good variation to use if you are pregnant or if you have a larger body

- Experiment with the arms in different positions: Clasp your hands behind your back for a shoulder stretch and then move dynamically into a forward fold (hands still clasped) and back again into Utkatasana
- Or, bring your palms together into Anjali Mudra (prayer position, thumbs to chest) preparing for Parivrtta Utkatasana / Revolved Chair pose.



## *Extended Side Angle Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Stand facing the long side of your mat with your feet about a leg distance apart.
- Turn your right foot out so your toes are pointing to the short edge of the mat and turn your left toes in, about 45 degrees. You are looking for stability through both legs.
- As you exhale, bend your right knee, thigh parallel to the floor, knee above the ankle
- Take a deep inhale and firm your lower abdomen in and up.
- As you exhale, extend your body over the right leg, and bring your right arm down, either with your elbow on your right thigh or place your hand on the floor to the inside or the outside of the right foot - whatever feels right for your body.
- Reach your left arm over your head, next to the left ear,
- Turn your palm so that you are bringing the little finger side of your hand to face the floor.

- Extend from the outside of the left heel through the left fingertips and revolve the ribcage up towards the ceiling. If your neck allows it, you can look up from underneath the left armpit to the ceiling.
- Hold this pose anywhere from 5 to 15 breaths.
- To come out of this pose press actively into your feet, and on an inhalation strongly extend through the left arm as you come back up to straight.
- Reverse the direction of your feet to do the same pose on the other side.

### **Beginner tips**

- Keep pressing the floor away with both feet, to find lightness in your spine.
- Use a block or rest your forearm on your thigh if it helps.

### **Benefits**

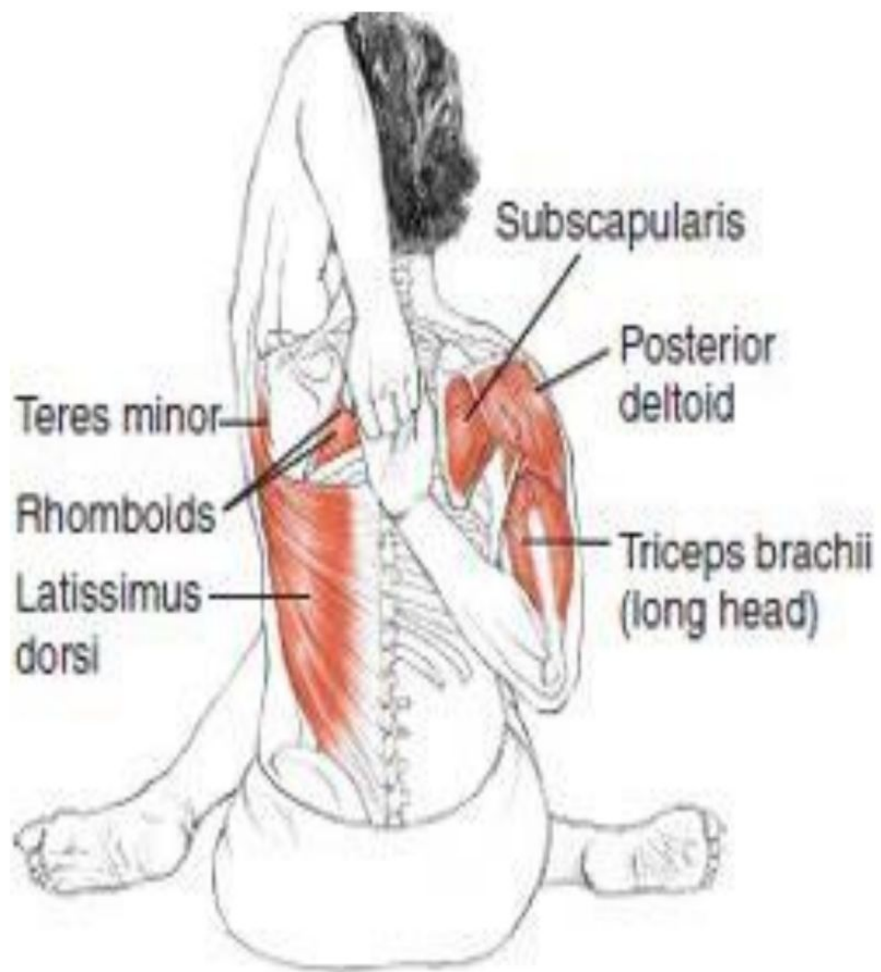
- Strengthens and stretches the legs, ankles and knees.
- Increases flexibility in the shoulders.
- Works the core muscles.

### **Watch out for**

- Try not to crunch the side waist as you bend. If this is happening rest your forearm on your thigh or use a block as suggested in the beginners' tips to keep your side waist long.
- Pay attention to keep your bent knee stacked above the ankle, and pointing in the same direction as your toes.
- If you have a shoulder injury, keep your top hand on your hip instead of lifting it up.

### **Variations**

- Try a dynamic variation of the pose, flowing from Extended side angle to Reversed Warrior on the exhalation, and back to Extended side angle on an inhalation.
- The body's weight always tends to shift to the ball of your front foot. To counteract this tendency try lifting the ball of the front foot and feeling once again the anchor of your back foot. Resist the floor with your back foot while allowing the top of your back thigh bone to sink deeper into the hip. Then let the ball of the front foot rest back on the floor.





## *Cow Face Pose*

### Step by step

- Start in **Dandasana** (Staff pose).
- Bend the right knee. Bring your left foot to the outside of your right hip, weaving it underneath your right knee. Bring your right foot to the outside of your left hip, so that your right knee is stacked on top of your left knee.
- Ground through your sitting bones.
- As you inhale, lengthen your spine and stretch your arms out to the sides, palms facing forward.
- Internally rotate your right shoulder so that your palm faces to the wall behind you and your thumb points down. Sweep the arm behind your back, walking your hand up between your shoulder blades, palm facing outwards.
- Stretch the left arm up, fingertips pointing towards the ceiling, the palm of your hand still facing forward. Bend the elbow and reach down for the right fingertips, hooking the fingers together if they reach.

- So you now have your right knee on top and your left elbow pointing upwards
- Firm your shoulder blades against your back ribs and open your chest.
- Stay for a few breaths.
- To come out of the pose, release the arms, uncross the legs and repeat on the other side. Remember to switch legs as well as the arms. Whichever knee is stacked on top, the opposite side elbow is pointing upwards.

### **Beginners tips**

- If you find it difficult to get into this pose, start the pose from all fours and cross your legs bringing your left knee to the inside of your right knee. Lower your hips in between your feet.
- If your sitting bones are not evenly resting on the floor, sit on a folded blanket, a block or a cushion. Make sure to keep your spine long.
- You can keep your lower leg stretched out in front of you or work with another hip opening pose like Pigeon pose

- If the fingertips don't meet just point them towards each other or take hold of your top or use a strap. Hold the strap with the top hand, the lower hand can just grab the strap if you cannot reach the hands together.

### **Benefits**

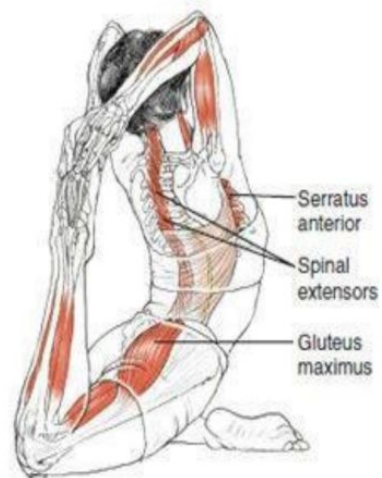
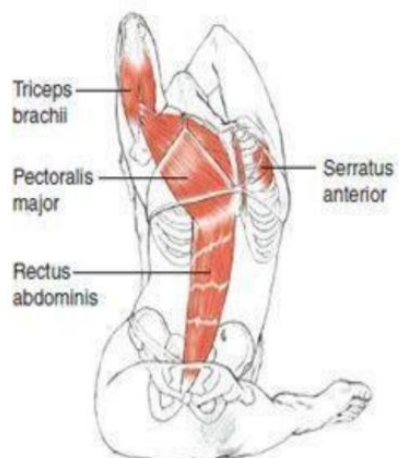
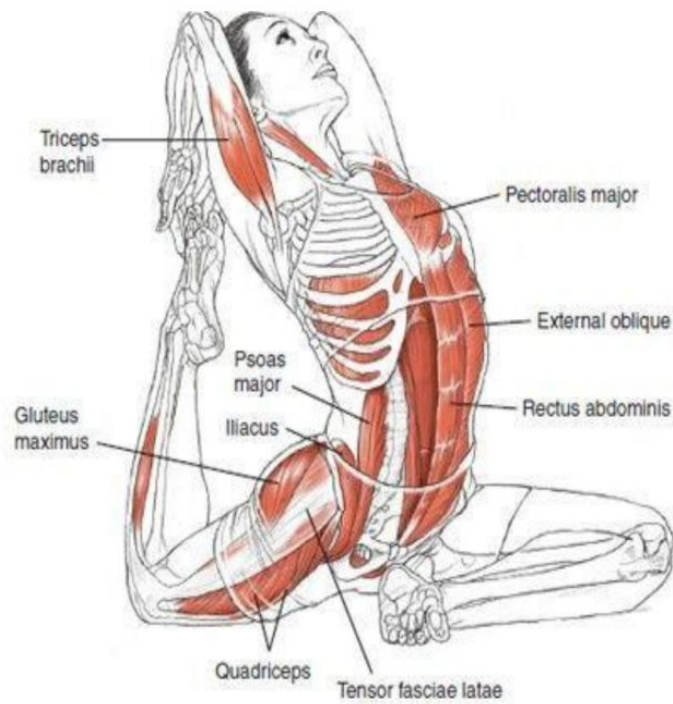
- Stretches the ankles, hips and thighs.
- Works your triceps and your rotator cuff and your upper back and chest muscles.
- Opens your chest and thoracic spine.

### **Watch out for**

- Keep your head upright in line with the spine.
- In case of shoulder injury, move your arm within the pain-free range of motion or choose a less intense shoulder opener.
- Pay attention to avoid any discomfort in your knees. The rotation should come from your hips. If you have a knee injury you can practice just the actions of the arms while in a more comfortable seated position or standing.

**Variations**

- You can intensify the stretch in this pose by folding forward. However, keep the weight in your sitting bones and not in your knees. Come out as you inhale.



## *Pigeon Pose*

### **Step by step**

- From all fours, bring your right knee forward towards your right wrist. Depending on your body it may be just behind your wrist or to the outer or the inner edge of it.
- Experiment with what feels right for you, giving you a stretch on your outer hip without any discomfort in your knee.
- Your right ankle will be somewhere in front of your left hip.
- Slide your left leg back and point your toes, your heel is pointing up to the ceiling.
- Scissor your hips together, by drawing your legs in towards each other. Use some support under your right buttock if needed, to keep your hips level.
- As you inhale, come onto your fingertips, lengthen your spine, draw your navel in and open your chest.
- As you exhale, walk your hands forward and lower your upper body towards the floor. You can rest your forearms and forehead on the mat.

- Stay for 5 breaths or longer.
- On each exhalation, try to release the tension in your right hip.
- To come out of the pose, push back through the hands, lift your hips and move your leg back into all fours. Repeat on the other side.

### **Beginners tips**

- This can be an intense stretch on the outer hip. Keep your right foot close to your left hip to start with. The more your shin is parallel with the front of the mat, the more intense the hip opener will be.
- If your forehead doesn't reach the mat you can make fists with your hands and stack them on each other then rest your forehead on your hands, or use a block.
- You can also stay up higher, resting on your elbows or hands, just remember not to slump in the shoulders - keep the base of the neck soft.
- Try the Figure Four variation, described below.

### **Benefits**

- Increases hip mobility.

- Uses core strength to keep your hips level.
- Calms your mind.
- Targets the psoas muscle and hip flexors.

**Watch out for**

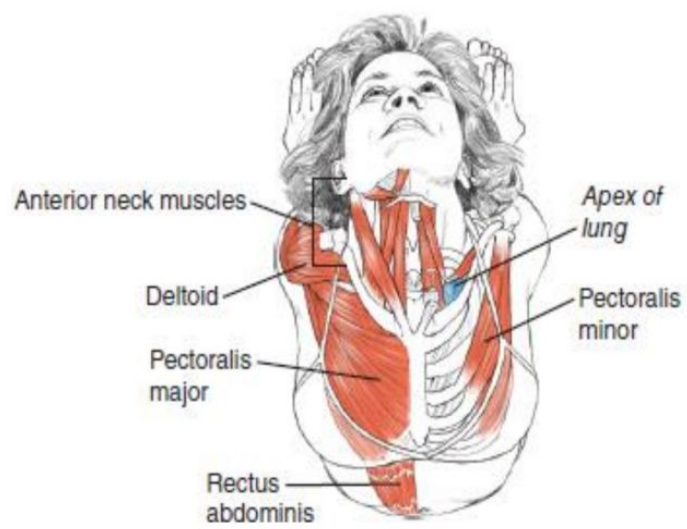
- Be very mindful of your knees, you shouldn't feel any sensation in them. If the knees hurt, bring the right foot closer to the left hip or even underneath the right hip.
- Keep the right foot flexed. Push out through the ball of the foot.
- If you have any knee injuries or discomfort, try the Figure Four version described below or substitute with an alternative pose.

**Variations**

- You can make this into a back bend instead of lowering the head to rest on the mat. Keep the arms straight and lift the chest.



- Try the Figure Four version. Sit with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, arms behind you for support. Bring your right ankle over your left knee, keeping the foot flex. Walk your left foot closer to your hip to increase the stretch.
- You can also do Figure four lying on your back. Cross your right ankle over left knee and take hold of the back of your left thigh, drawing it towards you. Change sides.



## *Camel Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Come onto your knees, place them hip-width apart, and then tuck your toes.
- Engage your inner thighs, draw your lower belly in and up, and roll your shoulders back
- On an inhalation, lengthen through both side waists, lift the chest up,
- With the lower body stable, on an exhale start to come into your backbend keeping the chest lifted and without crunching the neck or lower back
- As you lean back, find your blocks or heels with your hands - or you can do this one side at a time by circling one arm up and behind you
- Keep your inner thighs engaged, firm the shoulder blades into the back and stay for a couple of breaths
- Use your inhalation to help you come back up, then sit on your heels with a neutral spine for a moment.

### **Beginners tips**

- If your hands don't comfortably reach your heels use blocks on the side of each foot or place your hands on your hips instead
- Try placing a block between your thighs and squeeze it to activate your inner thighs
- Visualise lifting your breast bone to the sky.

### **Benefits**

- Helps with mobility in the shoulders and upper back
- Stretches the whole front of the body
- Strengthens the legs and back.
- Improves your posture
- Energizes body and mind.

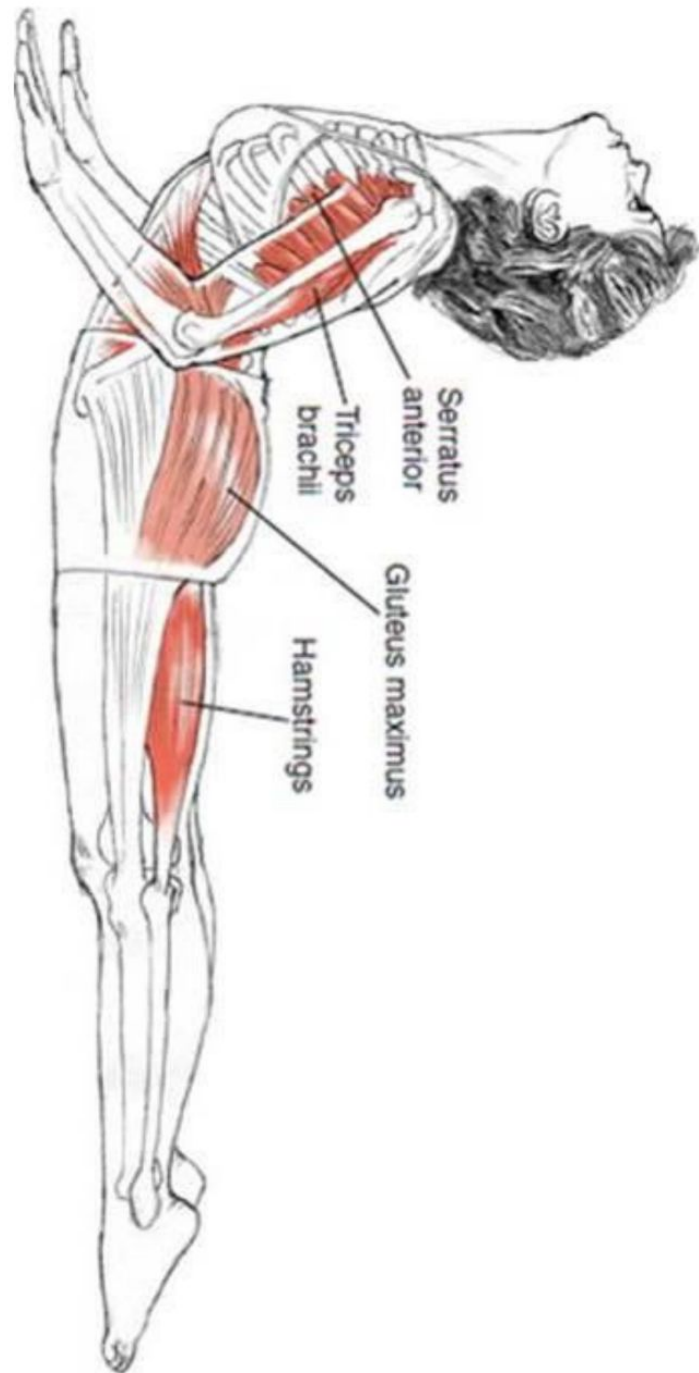
### **Watch out for...**

- If you have any tension or sensitivity in your neck, or if you feel lightheaded, keep your neck in a neutral position or with the chin towards the chest so that the back of the neck stays long and relaxed

- If you have a back injury, a more gentle backbend like Cobra or Sphinx pose may be more suitable - please check with your medical practitioner for specific advice
- Use a blanket under your knees or double up your mat to reduce any knee sensitivity Note - this will raise your knees and so may mean your hands have further to reach back to your heels, so use blocks if needed.

**Variations**

- You can work on the opening in the chest, lifting your breast bone as you inhale, shoulder blades firm on the back. Keep your hands on the lower back for support and pay attention to keeping length in the lumbar area
- Try this pose with the front of your body against a wall. Keep pressing the thighs to the wall as you bend backwards
- If you can easily take hold of your heels try pointing your toes back instead of tucking them under



## **Cobra Pose**

### **Step by step**

- Lie on your stomach, toes pointing straight back, hands underneath the shoulders, elbows close to the body. Legs engaged, pull the belly in and up
- As you inhale, lift your chest from the back of your heart. Roll the collarbones up and firm the shoulder blades into the upper back, slightly down along the spine
- Lift your head last. Open your heart, with no weight in the hands yet. Extend out through the toes
- Come down again as you exhale. Repeat that two times
- The third time you come up, use your hands to find your full expression of the pose. Lift your chest from the back of your heart, head follows. Come all the way up to a point where it feels good to you, still maintaining a connection from the pelvis to the legs
- Bring the side ribs forward, draw the upper arm bones back, lengthen the neck.

- Feel the backbend through the entire spine. You can look up, but only if you maintain length in the back of the neck, otherwise keep your gaze forwards so your neck is comfortable
- Stay for 5 to 10 breaths
- To come out, lower the body down on as you exhale and take a rest lying on your belly or in Child's pose.

**Beginners tips**

- Take your time in this backbend. Only go so far as it feels comfortable. Keep your belly engaged and lower back long. Maintain the connection with your hips on the floor
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and the base of your neck soft
- Point your elbows backwards rather than out to the sides

**Benefits**

- Strengthens the back and legs
- Stretches the front of the body, opening the chest and shoulders
- Energizes and mobilizes the spine.



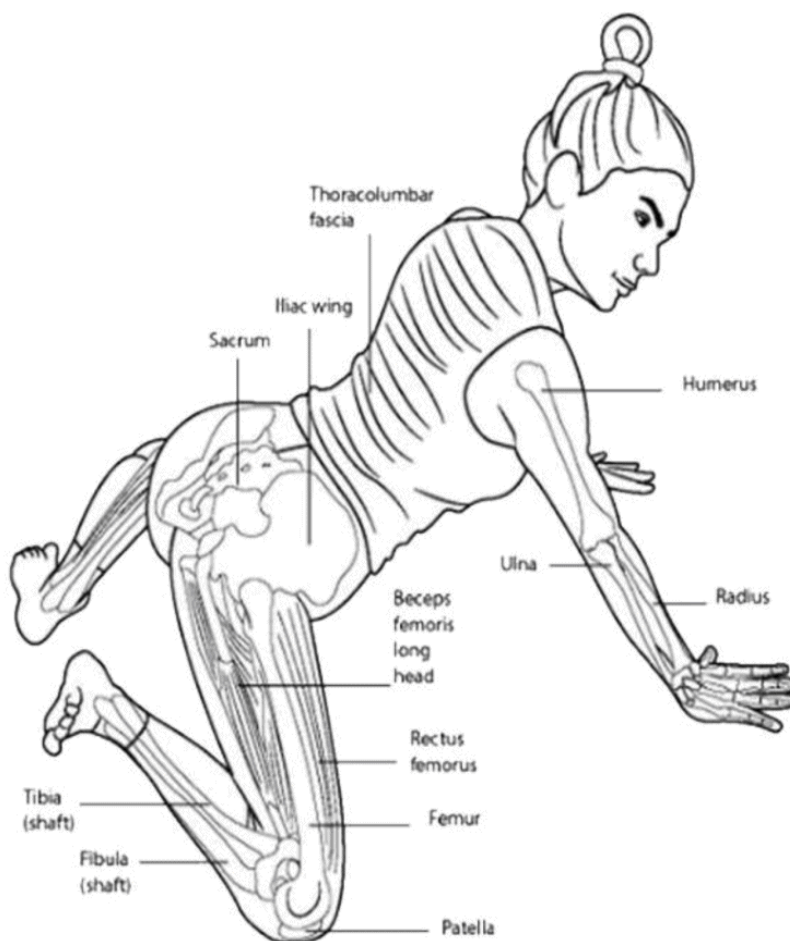
**Watch out for...**

- If you feel a strain in your lower back, lower yourself slightly or work with Sphinx pose - with your forearms on the mat
- If you have any wrist pain try bringing your hands further in front of you or slightly pointing out to decrease the angle. Or come on to your forearms as in Sphinx pose.

**Variations**

- You can get a stronger backbend by walking your hands slightly closer to your torso, straightening and lengthening the arms.

## Frog's Pose



## *Frog pose*

### **Step by step**

- From all fours, spread your knees wide, feet together or shins parallel to the edges of your mat, feet pointing outwards.
- Bring your hips in line with your knees and rest either on your elbows or chest flat on the mat, arms extended or under your forehead.
- You are looking for ‘nagging’ sensations in the inner thighs.
- Hold this pose for 1 to 3 minutes and eventually up to 5 minutes.
- To come out of the pose, bring your feet together, use your hands to push the floor away, and gently bring the knees in, one at a time. Rest in a comfortable Child’s pose variation for a few moments before your counter pose.

### **Beginners tips**

- Wide legged Child’s pose may be enough for you.

- Start by holding this pose for no longer than 1 min as the rebound effect can be intense.

### **Benefits**

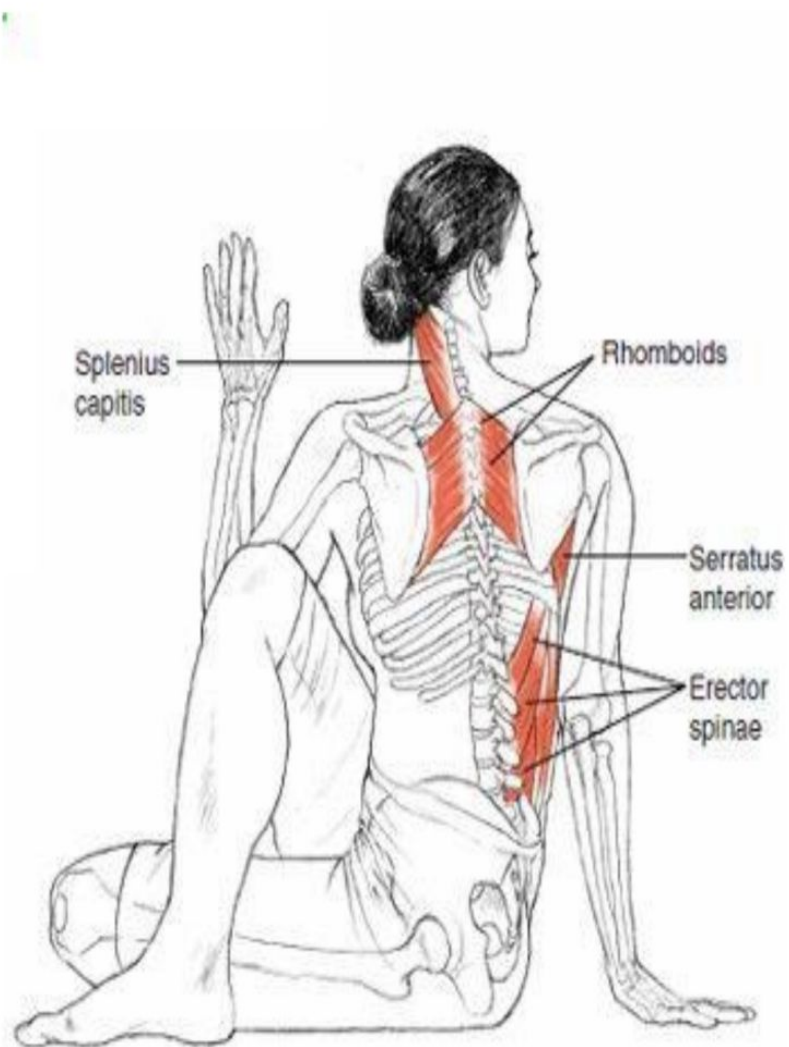
- Stretches the inner thighs.
- Regenerates the lower back tissues through gentle compression.
- Stimulates digestion.
- Relieves menstrual cramps.
- Stimulates Spleen, Kidney and Liver meridians.

### **Watch out for**

- If you have lower back issues, Wide legged Child's pose will be more appropriate
- Avoid tingling sensations in the arms while extended. Try spreading them wider, bend the elbows and rest your forehead on your hands or extend one arm at a time, and switch half way through.

### **Variations**

- Put a bolster lengthwise under your chest to support your upper body.
- Pad your knees with folded blankets.
- If you choose to extend both arms, you can place one cheek down, and switch sides halfway through.
- Adjust the position of your hips to adapt the intensity of the pose to your edge: moving the hips slightly forward will reduce the intensity and moving the hips slightly backwards will increase it.
- Try the Half Frog variation: lying on your belly, keep one leg straight and bring the other knee in line with your hips. Hold for 1 to 3 minutes Repeat on the other side.
- Try Frog at the wall: lie down with your hips against the wall, legs up. Spread your legs and bend your knees, placing your feet at the wall. Place blocks under your feet to deepen the sensations. If the sacrum lifts up, move your hips slightly away from the wall.



## *Half Lord Of The Fishes Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Sit with your legs outstretched in front of you in Staff Pose / Dandasana.
- Lift your right leg and place your right foot on the outside of your left knee. Bend your left leg and place the left foot on the outside of your right hip.
- As you inhale, press your sitting bones down and lengthen your spine. Place your right arm behind you, extend your left arm up.
- As you exhale, twist your body to the right, hugging your knee with your left arm, or hooking your elbow behind your left knee.
- Keep lengthening your spine on the in-breath and twisting from the belly on the out-breath.
- Find ease and your appropriate edge in that pose by moving in and out with barely noticeable pulses. Allow your hips to follow the movement of the spine to some degree.
- Stay for 5 to 8 breaths.

- To come out of the pose, come out of the twist as you exhale and move back into Dandasana.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Sit with your legs outstretched in front of you in Staff Pose / Dandasana.
- Lift your right leg and place your right foot on the outside of your left knee. Bend your left leg and place the left foot on the outside of your right hip.
- As you inhale, press your sitting bones down and lengthen your spine. Place your right arm behind you, extend your left arm up.
- As you exhale, twist your body to the right, hugging your knee with your left arm, or hooking your elbow behind your left knee.
- Keep lengthening your spine on the in-breath and twisting from the belly on the out-breath.
- Find ease and your appropriate edge in that pose by moving in and out with barely noticeable pulses. Allow your hips to follow the movement of the spine to some degree.
- Stay for 5 to 8 breaths.



- To come out of the pose, come out of the twist as you exhale and move back into Dandasana.
- Repeat on the other side.

**Beginners tips**

- Sit on a cushion or a blanket to be able to ground through both sitting bones and lengthen your spine. Keeping the spine long is your main focus in this pose.
- Try the pose with your lower leg outstretched in front of you. This can help if you struggle to keep both sitting bones grounded.
- Hugging your knee with your hand, instead of hooking the elbow behind it, is a perfectly good option.

**Benefits**

- Helps to maintain the spine's natural range of motion.
- Stretches your hips, shoulders and neck.
- Stimulates the abdominal area and can help digestion.
- Relieves backache and tension.

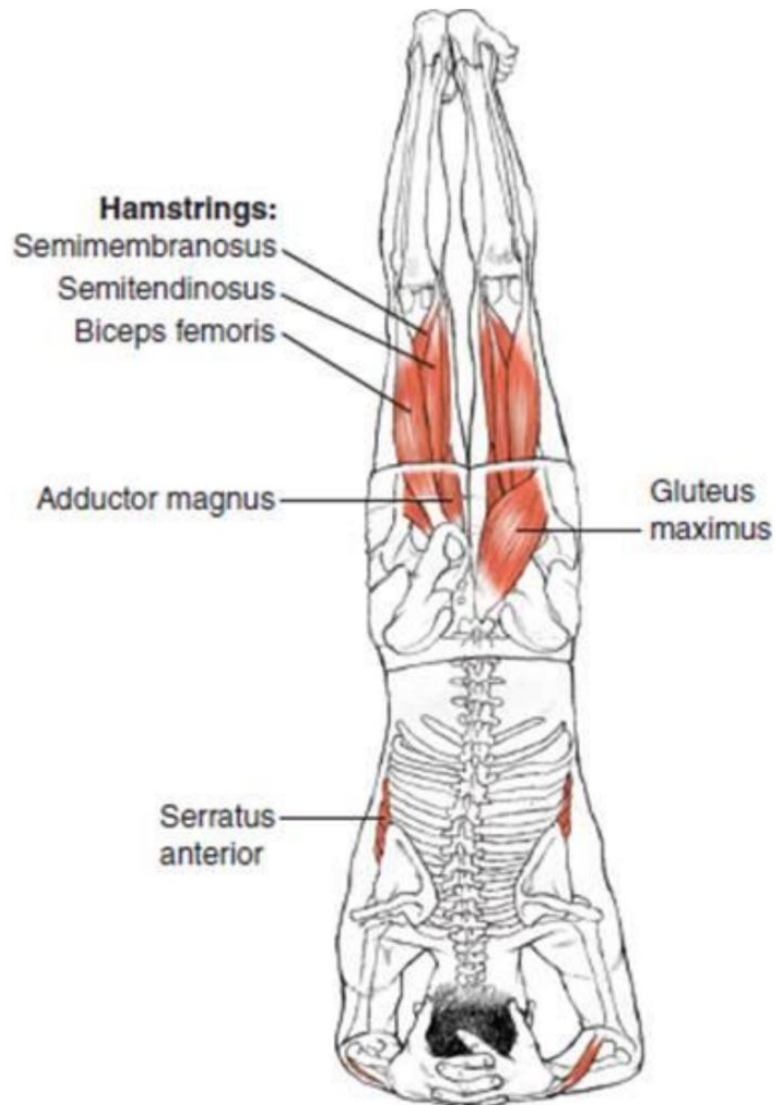
- Especially good if you have been working at a desk all day.

**Watch out for**

- If you have a spinal injury such as a slipped disc you may need to avoid twisting poses or practise them under the supervision of your health professional.
- This pose can be amazing to relieve lower back pain, if you stay very mindful and respectful of your boundaries and body sensations.
- Don't allow your lower back to collapse, if you feel you can't keep your back straight in this twist, sit up on something like a block or blankets.

**Variations**

- To deepen the twist, move to a wall. Make sure your back is facing the wall, and sit a foot or so away from it, depending on the length of your arms. When twisting, use the wall as an opposing force to help move the front of the torso against the thigh.



## *Headstand Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Start your Headstand journey by practising Dolphin pose. Once you are able to stay in Dolphin for 25 breaths, you can start working towards Headstand. However, we recommend working with a teacher who can guide you in person. The following instructions are not intended for beginners to Headstand.
- To find the right head placement on the floor, place the heel of your hand on the bridge of your nose and notice where your middle finger reaches the head. That's the spot you want to place on the floor.
- Start in all fours, your elbows directly under your shoulders.
- Take hold of the elbows with the opposite hands to ensure that your elbows are shoulder-width apart.
- This alignment is essential to build the right foundation for your pose and access your upper body strength.
- Tuck your toes under and come up into Dolphin. Bend your knees if

needed, to find length in the spine.

## 38

- Interlace your fingers, tucking the bottom little finger in. Snuggle your head in your hands. Root the forearms in the floor. Tuck your toes and lift your hips up. Keep your knees bent if you need to.
- Bend one knee into the chest, then the other knee, keeping most of the weight in your arms. On an inhalation bring your legs up in line with the rest of the body: hips above shoulders and ankles above hips.
- Lengthen the tailbone up towards the heels. Root your elbows down and knit your ribs in.
- Breathe.
- To come out of the pose, bend your knees and bring your feet to the buttocks, knees to the chest, and with control place your feet back on the floor. Rest in Child's pose.

### **Beginners tips**

- Headstand is a controversial pose. While it is known as the King of Poses because of its reported benefits, some teachers feel the weight on the neck is too great a risk and no longer teach it for that reason.

- These instructions are meant as a guide only and we recommend practising in the presence of a teacher who can help you with your alignment.
- Whether you choose to practise the full pose or not, building up strength in the arms, shoulders and core first is essential preparation. Practise a class such as Nichi Green's Headstand prep or Sandra Carson's Headstand 101. This preparation work will help you with your whole yoga practice and in many ways is more challenging than being in Headstand - so be patient!
- Core strengthening work will help with all inversions. Simply holding Plank pose and Downward Dog for 1 to 2 minutes is a great place to start. Next, work on Dolphin pose, and then Forearm balance or Handstand to get used to being upside down without any weight on the neck.

**Benefits**

- Draws fresh blood into the upper body while stimulating drainage and circulation to the legs.
- It quietens the mind and so prepares you for meditation.
- Strengthens the arms, core, legs and back.

- Improves mood for many people.

#### **Watch out for**

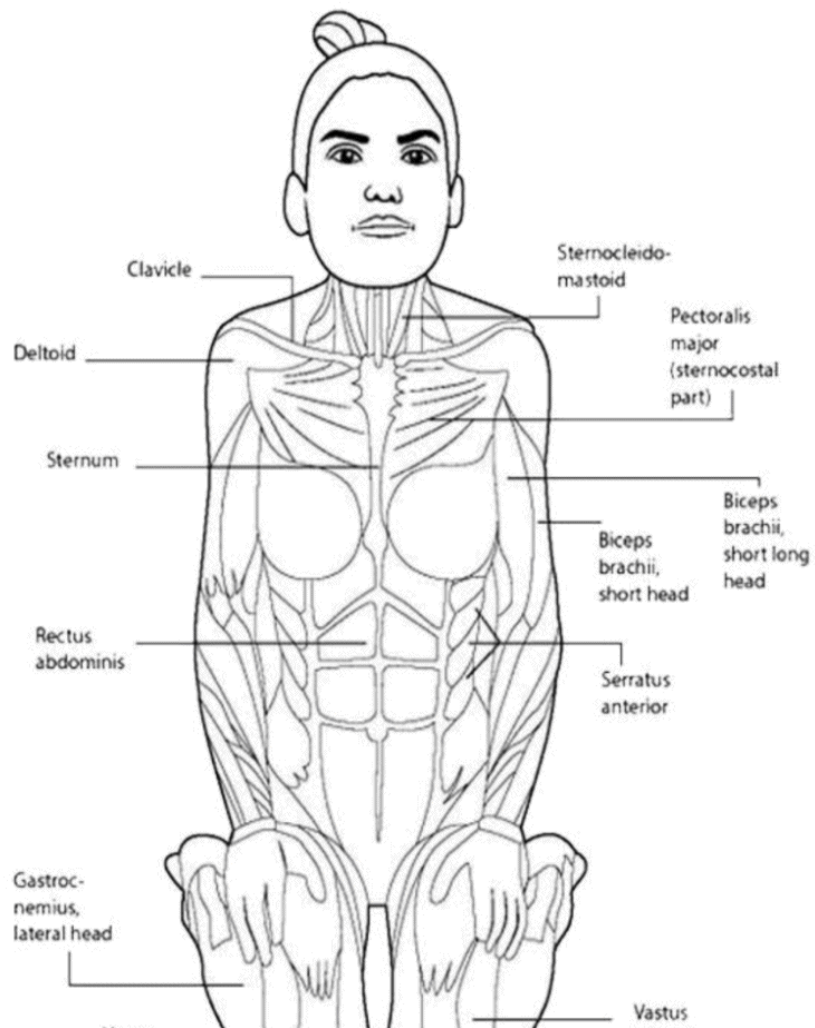
- Don't attempt Headstand if you have any neck, spine or shoulder problems.
- Inversions such as Headstand (poses where your heart is above your head) are not recommended if you have high blood pressure or glaucoma.
- Some women prefer not to practise inversions like Headstand while they are menstruating as this goes against the natural flow - Read Should you practice yoga when you have your period?
- With the right alignment, Headstand should feel light, and your neck should feel uncompressed and long. If it doesn't, keep the weight in your arms and keep strengthening your foundation.
- Legs up the wall pose is a good alternative which still provides many benefits that inversions offer.

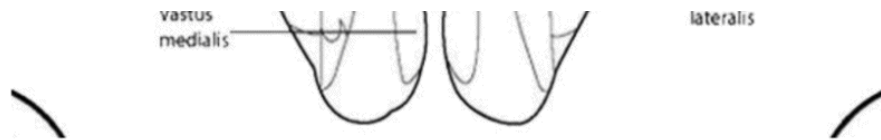
#### **Variations**

- You can practise half-Headstand with one or both of the legs at 90 degrees parallel to the floor.
- There are several leg variations including bringing the soles of the feet together and knees out, Garudasana (Eagle pose) legs, or into Lotus pose - known as Padmasana Sirsasana or Urdhva Padmasana.
- Try the following classes for more advanced Headstand variations: Headstand 201 and Headstand 301 with Sandra Carson



## Hero's Pose





## *Hero Pose*

### **Step by step**

- From all fours, bring your knees closer together and separate your feet slightly wider than hip distance apart.
- Press the top of your feet down and slowly lower your hips back until eventually sitting on the mat (or props) between the heels.
- Use your hands to roll the flesh of your calves away, draw your navel in and up, ground through your sitting bones and extend through the crown of your head.
- Stay for 5 to 10 breaths.
- Come out of the pose the way you came in, by placing the hands in front of you and lifting the hips back up to all fours.

### **Beginners tips**

- Use as many props as you need to raise the hips up, and avoid any discomfort in the knees. Stacking cushions or blocks between your feet is a

discomfort in the knees. Stacking cushions or blocks between your feet is a great option.

## 44

- You can practise the pose one leg at a time with one leg folded under and the other straight out in front of you before coming into the full pose.
- Gradually build up the length of time you stay in the pose.
- If your ankles are stiff, place a rolled up blanket underneath to decrease the stretch.
- Keep pressing firmly through the tops of the feet and firm the inner ankles in.

### **Benefits**

- Stretches ankles, tops of the feet, knees, and legs.
- Energises the legs when they are tired.
- A great alternative to Lotus pose for meditation.

### **Variations**

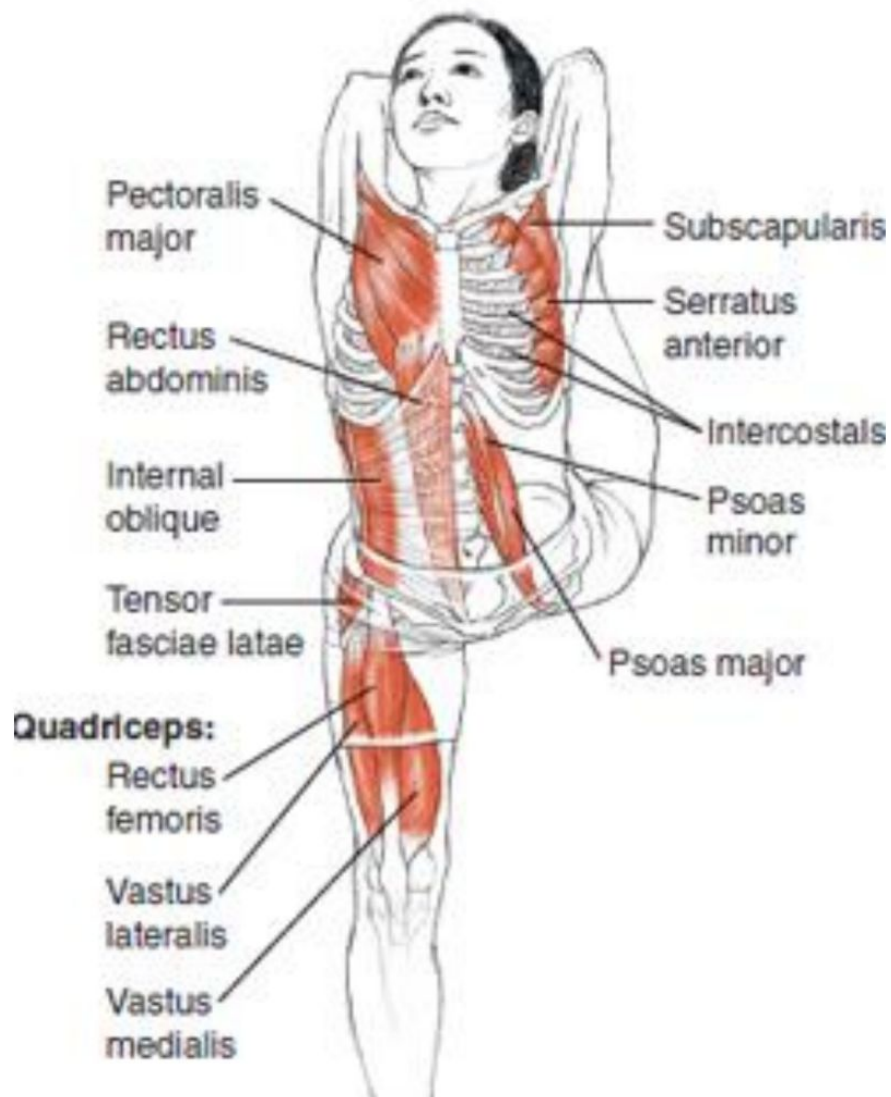
- An alternative version is to have your knees and feet together and then to sit on your heels rather than in between them

- In some cases, Virasana can be used therapeutically to treat knee pain, as described in Bernie Clark's article Yin Yoga for the knees and Esther Ekhart's class for members Virasana - Hero pose heals

**Watch out for**

- If you feel any discomfort in your knees, adjust the pose accordingly by elevating your hips by placing a block or cushion between the heels to sit on.
- Avoid in case of ankle or knee injuries.
- If your quads (front of thigh muscles) are very tight, come into the pose slowly and keep the hips higher by sitting on props such as yoga blocks or cushions. You should feel the stretch in the belly of the muscle rather than at the attachment points at the knees.

f





## *Dancer's Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Begin in Tadasana / Mountain pose.
- Press firmly and evenly through your feet and take a point on eye level to focus on.
- Exhale bend your left knee, bringing your left foot to the buttock, and hold the outside of your left foot with the left hand. Firm the right hip in and engage your right thigh and knee to make the standing leg strong.
- Keep the torso upright, the chest open and lengthen your tailbone down. As you inhale, push the left foot back into the hand, raising the leg so the thigh bone ends up parallel to the floor and the lower leg in a right angle with the thigh bone and vertical with the floor. You can lift your right arm up in front of you, parallel to the floor or a little higher next to the ear.
- Stay for 5-10 breaths.
- To come out of the pose, release the leg as you exhale. Repeat on the other

side.

### **Tips for beginners**

- If your balance is not great you can try doing this pose near a wall
- To help you get into the full expression of the pose, you can use a belt. Loop the belt around your left foot. Make sure the strap comes over your shoulder from the back. Then walk your hands down the belt, elbows pointing to the ceiling, hands behind the back, slowly lifting the foot.

### **Benefits**

- Strengthens the feet, ankles, legs, core, back and arms.
- Opens the front of the body, the chest, abdomen, hip flexors and the shoulders.
- Improves balance and concentration.

### **Watch out for**

- Don't lock the knee of the standing leg. You can keep a micro-bend in the

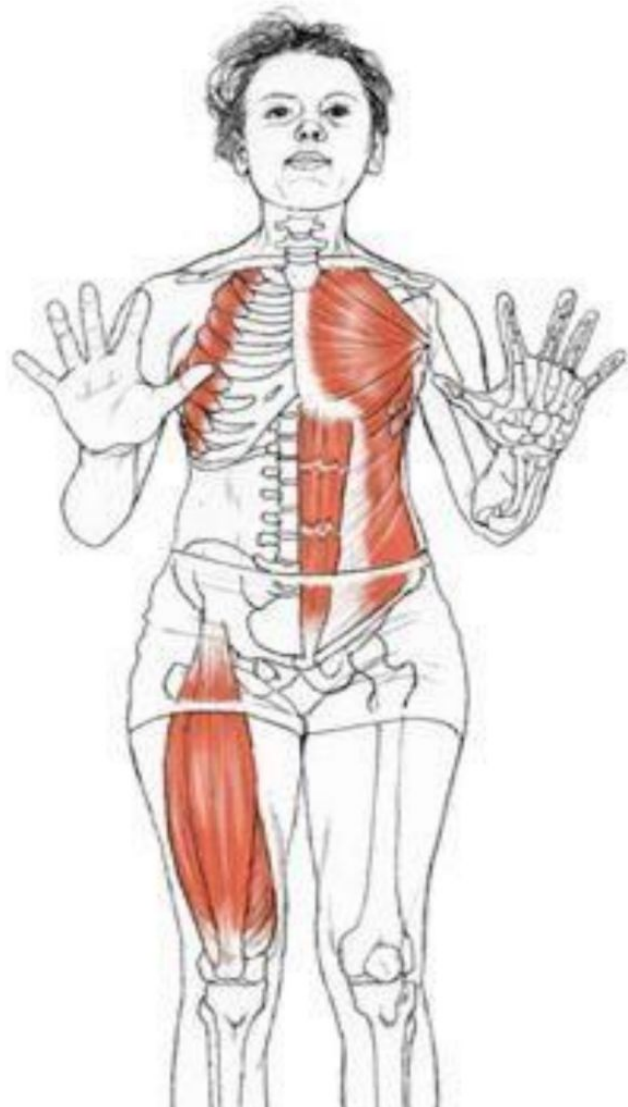
knee to avoid this.

- This is a strong backbend, make sure you are properly warmed up and prepared by sequencing this pose after other backbends like Cobra, Locust and Bow pose.

### **Variations**

- You can hold onto your bent leg with both hands, to intensify the opening in the chest. However, your balance needs to be good for this.
- You can try to hold the foot from the inside - this changes the stretch in the shoulder slightly.







51

## *Four Limbed Staff Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Starting from Plank Pose, firm your shoulder blades flat on your back and make your back muscles strong. Draw lower belly towards your spine and think about your tailbone pointing toward your feet.
- Rock slightly forward, over the toes, so you are projecting your body forward.
- Look slightly ahead of you to keep the neck long.
- On an out-breath, lower the whole body like a plank only so far, that the upper arms stay parallel to the floor and that there is a 90° angle in your elbows. Keep the elbows close to the ribs pointing back the whole time.
- Make sure the chest and shoulders don't dip lower than the elbows. Lift the front of the shoulders away from the floor the whole time.
- This pose is usually a transition between other poses as in Sun Salutations

or Vinyasas. You can also practise it by itself and hold it for between 10 to 30 seconds.

- On an inhale transition into Upward facing dog pose. If you can keep your lower back from collapsing, you can also push back up to Plank pose on an out-breath.

### **Beginners tips**

- To build strength in your upper body and core, start by practising holding Planks and Forearm Planks for up to a minute.
- You can also lower your knees first from Plank pose and then bend the elbows to come into a baby Chaturanga, keeping a straight line from your head to your knees.
- Or substitute Chaturanga with Knees-chest-chin / Ashtanga Namaskara: From Plank pose lower your knees, keep your core engaged and move your chest and chin towards the floor. Keep your shoulders up away from the floor and keep your chest open.

### **Benefits**

- Strengthens the core, wrists, arms and legs.
- Great preparation for more arm balances.

- For details about the muscles used in Chaturanga read Jennilee Toner's Our complicated shoulders and Chaturanga Dandasana

### **Watch out for**

- This is a strong pose which is repeated many times per class in some styles of yoga like Ashtanga and Vinyasa Flow. It is important to get your technique right to avoid shoulder injuries. Read Jennilee Toner's article on injury prevention for more about safe alignment in Chaturanga: Joint Integration - preventing yoga injuries.

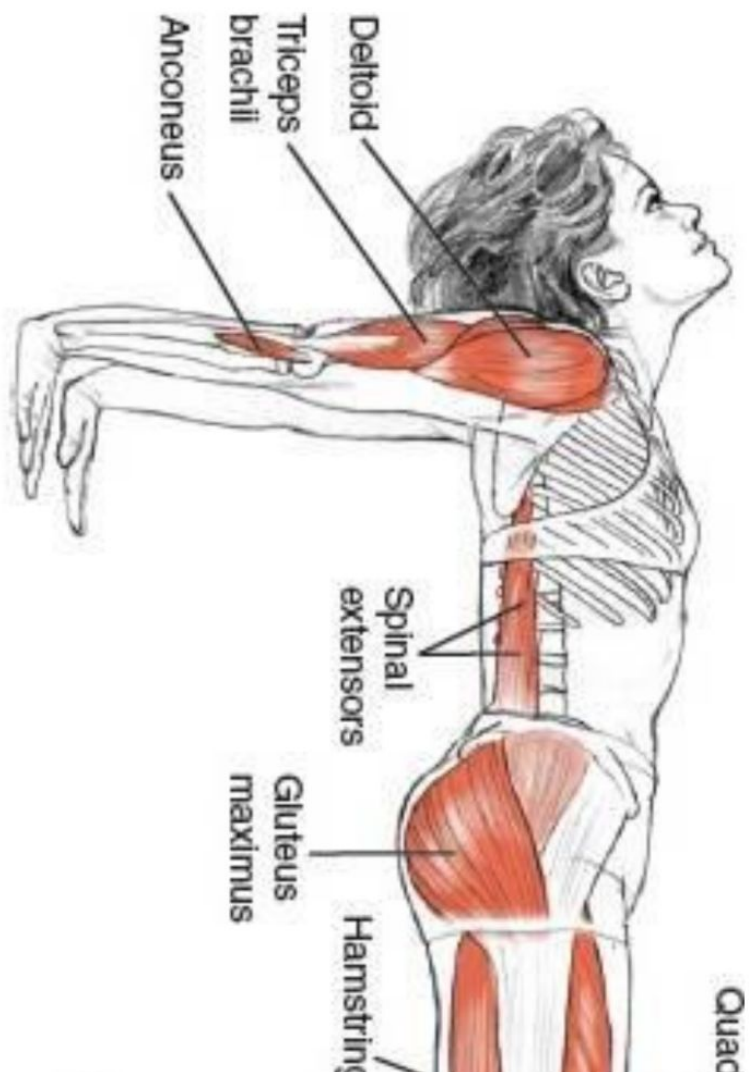
### **Variations**

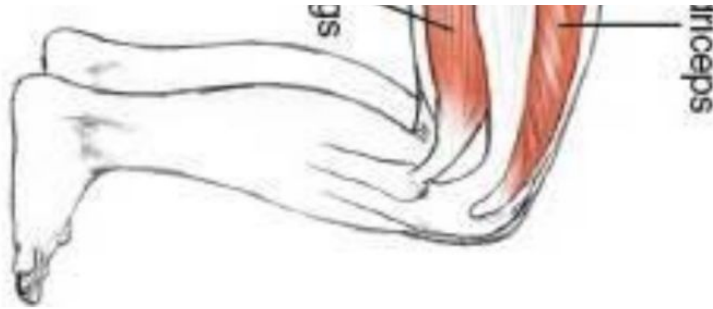
- As an alternative to Chaturanga you can either use Ashtanga Namaskara / Knees Chest Chin or Chaturanga with your knees down (see Beginners tips)
- For an extra challenge in Chaturanga, try lowering down from Plank with

only one foot on the floor, the other leg raised parallel to the floor.

- Add knee taps, if you are stable in the pose bring your right knee towards your right elbow. Then repeat on your left side.

- Make sure your shoulders stay lifted above elbow height as you add in the extra challenges.





56

## *Reverse Table Top Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Sit with your legs outstretched in front of you in Dandasana.
- Place your hands a little behind your hips with the fingers pointing towards the toes, point your toes.
- Roll your inner thighs in, draw your belly in and up, and as you inhale, lift your hips up as high as you can, keeping your chin to your chest.
- Firm your shoulder blades on your back to help lift your chest up.
- When your chest is lifted you may choose to bring your head back.
- Keep your chin tucked when you bring your head back, to the point where you can't keep it tucked anymore. Then gently release your head.
- Alternatively, if this feels too much for your neck, keep your head up and your chin towards your chest.

- Stay here for about 5 breaths, then as you exhale, lower your hips back down into Dandasana.

### **Beginners tips**

57

- If you find this too challenging, bend your knees and lift up into a reverse tabletop.
- Find a hand position that suits your shoulders: fingers point forward or away from you
- Engage your gluteus muscles (buttocks) to support you in this pose.

### **Benefits**

- Stretches the front of the shoulders, the chest and the front of the ankles.
- Strengthens the arms, core, legs and back.
- Excellent counterpose for Chaturanga Dandasana.

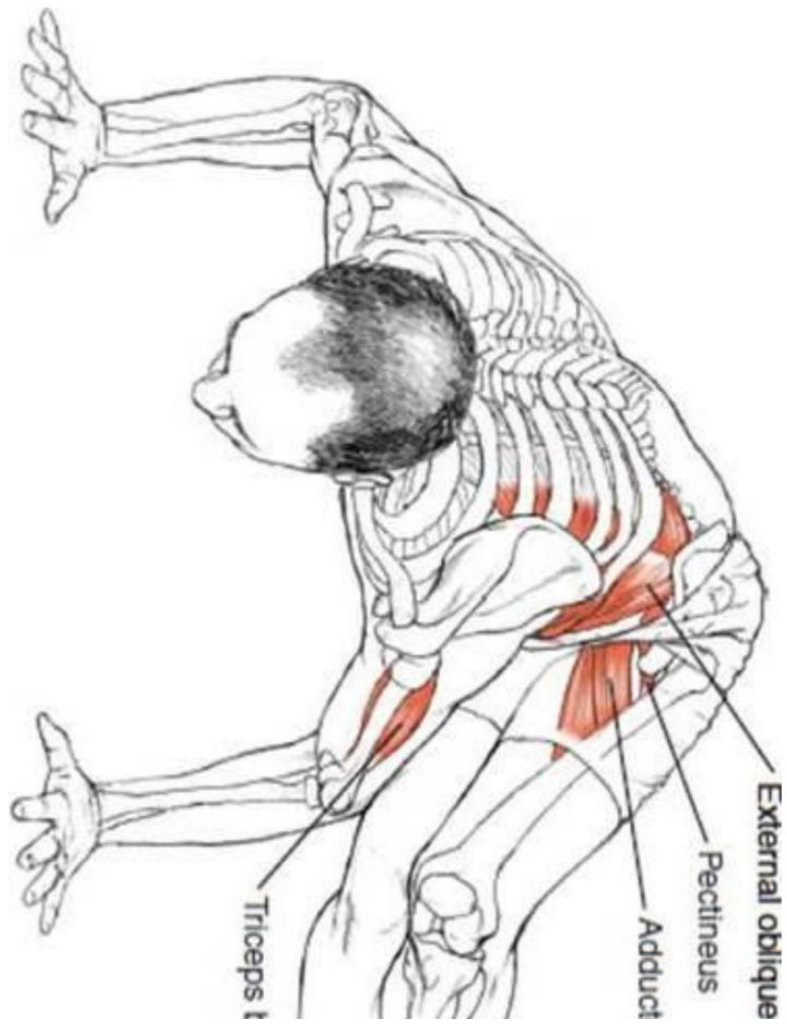
### **Watch out for**

- Be mindful of your neck - if there are any injuries or existing weaknesses in your neck, keep your chin to your chest.
- Keep your wrists directly under your shoulders in this pose.



## Variations

- Try moving dynamically between Purvottanasana and Dandasana a few times - creating a swinging action. Keep pressing through the hands so your hips remain off the floor in Dandasana. You can also place your hands on blocks for this variation.





60

## *Side Crow Pose*

### **Step by step**

- Start in Malasana / Squat pose with the feet apart, knees wider than your hips.
- Place your hands flat in front of you on the floor as if you were in Downward Facing Dog - middle finger pointing forward and with your fingers spread.
- Firm your hands down, pressing through the whole of the hand and your finger tips.
- Keeping your elbows bent, lift the hips high.
- Place your knees on the back of your upper arms as high up as you can, or squeeze the outer upper arms with your knees. Hug the knees and elbows

into your mid-line, exhale and round strongly through the upper back drawing your side waist up, using your abdominals.

- Then, squeezing in and up, bring the weight forward so the elbows end up straight over the wrist, bent at 90 degrees.

## 61

- Inhale, reach the heart forward and let one foot come up, then bring the other to meet it if possible. Bring the heels and big toes together.
- Stay for about 5/10 breaths all the time pressing firmly through the hands to feel the rebound lift.
- Exhale and come back into a squat position when you are ready.

### **Benefits**

- Strengthens the wrists, arms, shoulders, inner thighs and core muscles.
- Mobilizes the upper back and hips.
- Over time this pose will make you feel strong and confident.

### **Beginners tips**

- Fear is often the biggest obstacle when starting with arm balances like Crow Pose, so it can help to have a cushion nearby at first while you are

getting used to it. Place it on the floor in front of your hands. You probably won't use it but it's there!

- You can practise the shape of the pose on your back first in Happy Baby Pose. This will also warm up your back and hips to help them release in this pose.
- You can start with raising just one foot keeping just the toe of your other foot to the floor.
- You need strength in the upper body, wrists and core for this pose so you can build it up by working on your Downward Dog, Chaturanga and Plank poses.

#### **Watch out for**

- Make sure that your wrists are properly aligned for Crow Pose. This is particularly important as once you get lift off in the pose it can become a little addictive!
- Your upper arms - it's common to get bruises on the backs of your arms

when you are starting out with Crow Pose. As you develop lightness in the pose through practice this will lessen. If it is particularly painful place your knees to your outer upper arms instead of resting on the backs of them.

### **Variations**

- Over time work on lifting the heels up towards the buttocks.
- Work on keeping the arms straight and the knees higher.
- Crow Pose is a gateway to all the other arm balances and can be used in transitions between poses such as Tripod Headstand





## *Revolved Side Angle Pose*

### **Step-by-Step**

- Stand in Tadasana. With an exhalation, step or lightly jump your feet 3½ to 4 feet apart. Rest your hands on your hips. Turn your right foot out to the right 90 degrees and turn your left foot *in* slightly to the right. Align the right heel with the left heel. Firm your thighs and turn your right thigh outward, so that the center of the kneecap is in line with the center of the right ankle.
- Exhale and turn your torso to the right until you're facing directly out over the right leg; as you do this, lift your left heel off the floor and spin on the ball of the foot until the inner left foot is parallel to the inner right foot. Then exhale again and bend your right knee. If possible, bring the right



thigh parallel to the floor. Keep your left leg active by pressing the thigh up toward the ceiling and extending strongly through the left heel. At the same time, resist the lift of the left thigh by pressing the tailbone toward the pubis.

- With another exhale turn further to the right and lean the torso down, placing the left hand on the floor inside the right foot. Dig your right thumb into the right hip crease and push the thighbone down toward the floor. Firm the shoulder blades into the back ribs and lean the torso back slightly, away from the inner thigh. Stay in this position for a few breaths.
- If this position seems challenging enough, stay for the recommended time. If you want to go further, bend your left elbow and bring it to the outside of the right knee. Resist the knee and elbow against each other. If possible, straighten your left elbow and reach the hand toward the floor (if you can't reach the floor, support your hand on a block). You can keep your right hand on your hip, or stretch it over the back of the right ear with the palm facing down. Then turn your head to look at the right arm. As in all twists lengthen and soften the belly, extend the spine with each inhalation, and increase the twist as you exhale.

- Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Inhale to come up, exhale to release the twist. Reverse the feet and repeat for the same length of time to the left. Then return to Tadasana.

#### Beginner's Tip

- Beginners often have difficulty maintaining their balance in this pose, especially with the back heel lifted off the floor. To improve your balance, support your heel, either by standing it on a sandbag or thick book, or by bracing it against a wall.

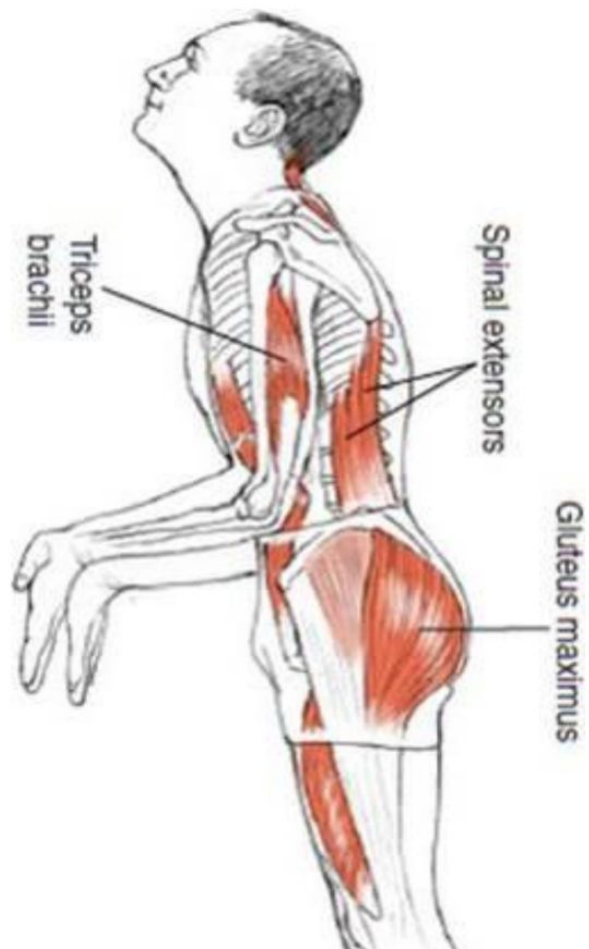
#### Benefits

- 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

### Variations

You can perform this pose with your hands in a modified Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal). Perform steps 1 through 4 in the main description above. Press the bent elbow against the outside of the bent knee, but don't straighten the arm. Then bend the top elbow and press your palms together. You

probably won't be able to touch your thumbs to your sternum, as you do in traditional Anjali Mudra. Open your elbows wide, stretching your bottom elbow toward the floor, the top elbow toward the ceiling. Use the pressure of the elbow against the knee and the palms against each other like a crank to increase the twist in the upper back.





70

## *Peacock Pose*

### **Step-by-Step**

- Kneel on the floor, knees wide, and sit on your heels. Lean forward and press your palms on the floor with your fingers turned back toward your torso (thumbs pointing out to the sides). Bend your elbows slightly and touch the pinky sides of your hands and the outer forearms (up to the elbows) together. Then bend your elbows to a right angle and slide your knees to the outside of your arms and forward of your hands. Lean your front torso onto the backs of your upper arms and burrow your elbows deep into your belly at or below the navel.
- If your elbows slide apart, you can bind them together with a strap.

Position the strap just above your elbows. If you can't quite manage the full pose (as described in the next step), support your feet on a block (sitting on one of its sides), placed near the back end of your sticky mat.

- Firm your belly against the pressure of the elbows. Lower your forehead to the floor. Then, straighten your knees and stretch your legs out behind your torso, tops of your feet on the floor. Firm your buttocks and round

## 71

your shoulders slightly downward. Lift your head off the floor and look forward. Lean your weight slightly forward—if your legs and buttocks are firm and active, this slight shift of weight will lever your feet off the floor. Position your torso and legs approximately parallel to the floor.

- Hold at first for about 10 seconds, gradually increasing your time to 30 seconds as you gain more experience with the pose. Then lower your head and feet to the floor, bend your knees, and lift your torso off your arms.

### Beginner's Tip

- To balance in this pose, support your forehead and/or your front ankles on a block.

### Benefits

- Strengthens the wrists and forearms
- Tones the abdomen
- Strengthens the back torso and legs

Balancing poses like Peacock Pose are beneficial for building core strength necessary for other advanced poses. You will feel the stretch the deepest in

your wrists and forearms, though your core will also be engaged. As you balance your body on your hands, the extension of your legs will help release tension by opening up your back.

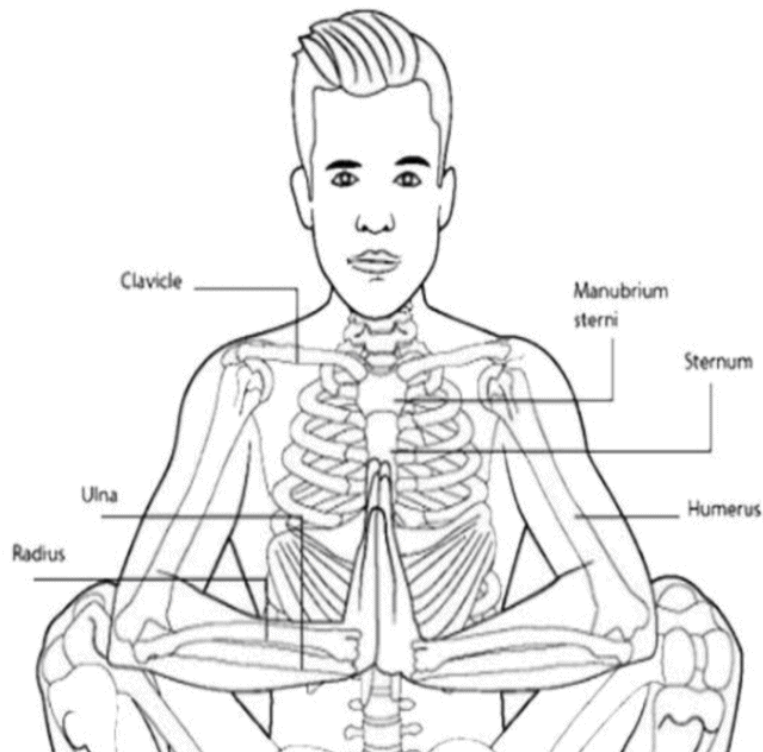
As you squeeze your legs together to keep your lower body above the ground, your pelvis will also open up, and your thigh muscles will become engaged. This stretch opens up and strengthens the whole body. The anti-gravity aspect of Peacock Pose may appeal to people who stand on their feet for long hours during the day.

Many advanced arm poses require enough upper body strength to balance the rest of the body. It takes a lot of regular practice for people of all experience levels to master this pose and experience the benefits. Incorporating this hand-balancing pose will prepare you for other yoga

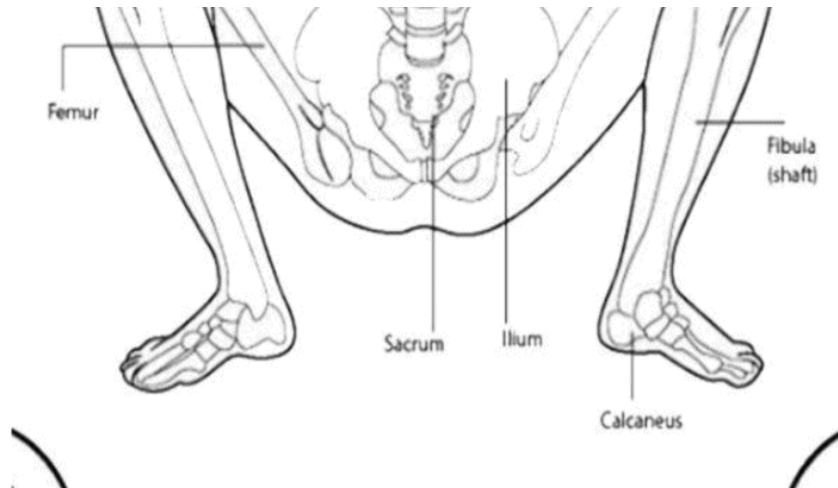
poses that require upper body strength and balance.

73

## Garland Pose







74

## *Garland Pose*

### Step-by-Step

- Squat with your feet as close together as possible. (Keep your heels on the floor if you can; otherwise, support them on a folded mat.)
- Separate your thighs slightly wider than your torso. Exhaling, lean your torso forward and fit it snugly between your thighs.
- Press your elbows against your inner knees, bringing your palms to together in Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal), and resist the knees into the elbows. This will help lengthen your front torso.
- To go further, press your inner thighs against the sides of your torso. Reach your arms forward, then swing them out to the sides and notch your

shins into your armpits. Press your finger tips to the floor, or reach around the outside of your ankles and clasp your back heels.

- Hold the position for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then inhale, straighten the knees, and stand into Uttanasana.

#### Beginner's Tip

- If squatting is difficult, sit on the front edge of a chair seat, thighs forming a right angle to your torso, heels on the floor slightly ahead of your knees. Lean your torso forward between the thighs.

#### Benefits

- Stretches the ankles, groins and back torso
- Tones the belly





