

THE SECRET OF YOGA



LEARN 17 FOUNDATIONAL ASANAS
AND THEIR CLASSICAL SEQUENCE



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THE BASIC STRUCTURE:
THE FOUNDATION FOR
HATHA SEQUENCING

FOLLOWING THE NATURAL ORDER

As we have seen in the chapter about the history of yoga, it is impossible to draw upon a unified and classical tradition of yoga asana practice. It is therefore also not possible to give a watertight explanation of why asanas should or even could be sequenced in any particular way.

When speaking about the art of sequencing yoga practices, what we can discuss, though, is that sequencing should be done in a comprehensive and consistent way, without becoming rigid and choreographed. And, that we should practice asanas in a manner that reflect the core principles of Hatha Yoga: following the Laws of Nature, following the Principle of Minimal Action. We should aim to design sequences that create the most natural and effortless flow of prana through your body.

The sequence of yoga postures described in this book works from the Crown Chakra downward. This replicates the downward-descending, purifying element that purifies and stimulates your body. In doing so it creates space and the possibility for astral energies, such as the Kundalini Shakti, to rise upward.

Following these principles of natural order, on a merely physical plane we stimulate the nervous system in an organic and holistic way: starting with the brain and the spinal cord. They together form the central nervous system, which manages the entire body. By activating and stimulating the central nervous system, we subsequently activate the peripheral nervous system as well. So starting with the Crown Chakra and moving along the spinal cord in a downward pattern, we activate the complete nervous system in a systematic manner and in way requiring the least effort.

Another natural downward movement is excretion. One of the main purposes of asanas within the Hatha Yoga tradition is to purify the physical body. One of the most effective ways to do so is to ensure proper elimination of toxins on physical, and subtle levels. Improper elimination is usually caused by sluggishness and stagnation.

These lead to accumulated toxins and wastes, which in turn create imbalance and disharmony in the physical and astral bodies.

A yoga asana practice according to Hatha Yoga principles follows the downward movement of Apana Prana. Apana is considered to be the second-most important of the five vayus, or types of prana in Hatha Yoga and Ayurveda. Vayu is a Sanskrit word that means “wind” and refers to the different movements of prana (life force) through the body. Apana Vayu is responsible for regulating the outward flow of prana from the body and governs elimination of physical wastes and toxins from the body. Yogis in ancient India who developed yoga asanas were convinced that maintaining equilibrium in the body results in good health. The first step towards this is making sure that your elimination processes work smoothly.

So the practice of yoga asanas according to Hatha Yoga principles is structured in a manner that the chakras and their corresponding organs and glands in the physical body are stimulated in a top-to-bottom sequence. This ensures a holistic activation of the entire body and proper elimination of wastes and toxins.

CHAKRA-WISE: THE 17 PRIMARY ASANAS

The following sequence of 17 primary asanas is based on the teachings of Swami Sivananda (1887 – 1963). This sequence will provide the framework for your yoga practice or yoga class. Swami Sivananda was one of the pioneer teachers who made Hatha Yoga accessible to the broad public. Yet he did so by maintaining yoga's connection to classical teachings.

In the following pages we will provide a detailed overview of a well-balanced sequence. It is accessible both to beginners and to more advanced practitioners alike. The basic sequence is comprised of 17 asanas. Within this set of asanas, 3 different relaxation poses (Corpse Pose, Child's Pose, and Crocodile Poses) are not included. This is because they have already been described in the previous chapter.

Each of the 17 asanas is assigned to its respective chakra. Accompanying each of the asanas you will find detailed benefits, instructions, cues on alignment, contraindications and cautions, and modifications.

By the time you have reached the chapter with the variations and have understood the principle of how to add and replace asanas, you will possess a detailed understanding on how to create hundreds of balanced yoga sequences based on these ancient principles.

Asana for the Sahasrara & Ajna Chakras (Crown & Third-Eye Chakras)

1. SHIRSHASANA

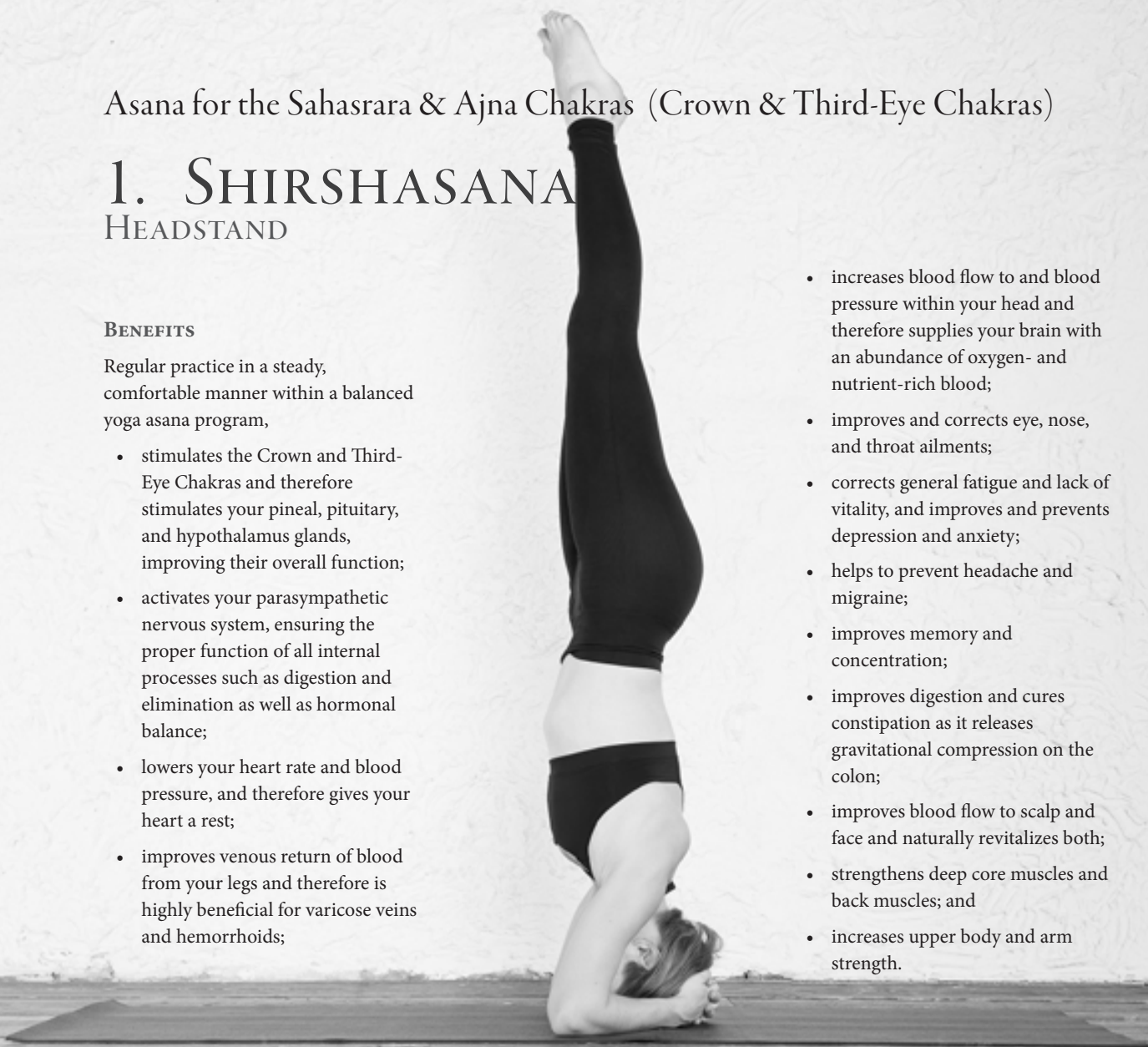
HEADSTAND

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady, comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program,

- stimulates the Crown and Third-Eye Chakras and therefore stimulates your pineal, pituitary, and hypothalamus glands, improving their overall function;
- activates your parasympathetic nervous system, ensuring the proper function of all internal processes such as digestion and elimination as well as hormonal balance;
- lowers your heart rate and blood pressure, and therefore gives your heart a rest;
- improves venous return of blood from your legs and therefore is highly beneficial for varicose veins and hemorrhoids;

- increases blood flow to and blood pressure within your head and therefore supplies your brain with an abundance of oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood;
- improves and corrects eye, nose, and throat ailments;
- corrects general fatigue and lack of vitality, and improves and prevents depression and anxiety;
- helps to prevent headache and migraine;
- improves memory and concentration;
- improves digestion and cures constipation as it releases gravitational compression on the colon;
- improves blood flow to scalp and face and naturally revitalizes both;
- strengthens deep core muscles and back muscles; and
- increases upper body and arm strength.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Sit on your knees and hold your elbows to measure the ideal distance. Then bring your arms to the floor under your shoulders.

Keeping your elbows there, bring your hands closer and interlock your fingers to form a cup.

Place the top of your head on the floor, with the back of your head held by your cupped hands.

Keeping your head and your elbows there, straighten your knees and lift your hips upward. Keeping your weight on your elbows, walk with your feet toward your head, keeping your knees straight. Keep walking until your hips are directly over your shoulders.

Slowly lift one foot at a time off the floor, bringing your knees in toward your chest. Hold this position for one breath, pushing your elbows into the floor.

Keeping your knees bent and together, slowly straighten both legs to the ceiling.

Focus on a point, keep pushing your elbows into the floor, and breathe slowly and deeply.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

To come down, keep one foot toward the ceiling, and with control, lower the other foot to the floor.

Relax in the Child's Pose for 30 seconds.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Ultimately the aim is to have your ears, shoulders, hips, and ankles in one straight line. This is ideal for long holds. As you start to learn the pose, though, refer to the alignment described a little further down in Modifications.

Maintain the majority of your weight on the top of your head while your arms share the weight and provide a supportive base.

Draw away your shoulder blades from your ears, toward your waist, keeping your neck elongated and stable.

DURATION OF HOLD

Beginners : 10 seconds – 1 minutes

Intermediate : 1 – 5 minutes

Advanced : 5 – 15 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS &

CAUTIONS

- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular issues
- Neck issues
- Shoulder issues
- Recent surgery or inflammation in your head region (for example ears, eyes, nose, etc.)
- Arthritis or osteoporosis
- Brain injuries
- Lower-back and spinal issues (e.g. chronic pain, herniated disc, sciatica, SI-joint instability)
- Acute migraine or headache
- For asthma or other breathing disorders: holding only for short durations and skipping altogether if it causes too much discomfort, nausea, or shortness of breath
- Practitioner younger than seven, because the skull is still a bit soft and it is safer not to place weight on it yet

MODIFICATIONS

In the beginning phase, when learning Headstand, make sure to keep your feet slightly in front of your body. Do not aim for shoulders-hips-ankles alignment, because that increases the risk of toppling over. Until you can enter and exit the pose with control by yourself and hold for at least 1 minute, keep your feet slightly in front of you.

An easier and less intense pose, that still gives you the benefits of the inversion, is Half Headstand.

Asanas for the Vishuddha Chakra (Throat Chakra)

2. SARVANGASANA

SHOULDERSTAND

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady, comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Throat Chakra and therefore stimulates your thyroid and parathyroid glands, improving their overall functioning and therefore balancing the metabolism, digestion, and insulin production;
- slows down your heart rate and lowers blood pressure, giving your heart a rest and reducing strain on your heart;
- activates your parasympathetic nervous system, ensuring the proper function of all internal processes such as digestion and elimination as well as hormonal balance;
- improves venous return of blood from your legs and therefore is highly beneficial for varicose veins and hemorrhoids;
- encourages deep abdominal breathing (because the use of the top portion of the lungs is limited), therefore increasing the effectiveness of each breath;
- improves digestion and cures constipation as it releases gravitational compression on the colon;
- provides a gentle massage to the heart and lung region;
- strengthens the deep-core muscles, legs, buttocks, and lower back; and
- increases upper-body and arm strength.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on the back, with your feet together and arms next to your body.

Keeping your head and neck on the floor, breathe in as you lift both legs to 90 degrees.

As you lift your hips up toward the ceiling, place your hands onto your hips and walk your hands up toward your shoulder blades.

Lift your hips up as high as you can, bringing your chest toward your chin.

Keep your back supported with your hands and make sure that your feet end up straight above your head.

Breathe slowly in this position and focus on the throat region.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

To come out of the pose, drop your legs slightly toward your head and place your hands on the floor. While keeping your head on the floor, use your hands as breaks and slowly roll down.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Try to straighten the back as much as possible. If required, bring your hands closer to your shoulders and your elbows a little closer to each other.

Make sure that your feet are right above your head, with most of your weight on your shoulders.

Your neck should not be bearing your body weight, and should not be pressing into the floor but keeping its natural curve off the floor. To accomplish this, draw your shoulder blades toward each other, creating an arch in your neck.

Keep your legs and feet relaxed and hold the pose with the least effort possible.

DURATION OF HOLD

Beginners : 30 seconds – 1 minute

Intermediate : 1 – 3 minutes

Advanced : 3 – 6 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS &

CAUTIONS

- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular issues
- Neck issues
- Shoulder issues
- Recent surgery or inflammation in your head region (for example ears, eyes, nose)
- Arthritis or osteoporosis
- Brain injuries
- Lower-back and spinal issues (e.g. chronic pain, herniated disc, sciatica, SI-joint instability)
- Acute migraine or headache
- Asthma or other breathing disorders (Hold only for short durations. Skip all together if it causes too much discomfort, nausea, or shortness of breath.)

MODIFICATIONS

It is recommended to place a folded blanket, 3 – 5 cm thick underneath your shoulders to release pressure on your neck. By placing the blanket underneath the shoulder girdle, but keeping your neck off the blanket, you create a level difference that allows your body to straighten up more, avoiding over-flexion and therefore strain of your neck.

If you struggle to hold the pose, you can use the wall as support.

3. HALASANA

PLOUGH POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Throat Chakra and therefore stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands, improving their overall functioning;
- slows down heart rate and lowers blood pressure, therefore giving the heart a rest;
- activates the parasympathetic nervous system, ensuring the proper function of all internal processes such as digestion, elimination, and so on;
- improves exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs by making active use of the lower part of the lungs;
- improves digestion and cures constipation as it releases gravitational compression on the colon;
- strengthens deep core muscles;
- increases upper body and arm strength;
- releases tension in the entire spine, especially the lower back and cervical region;
- stretches the hamstrings and glutes;
- creates flexibility in shoulder joints; and
- massages all visceral organs by compression, and upon release of the pose floods organs with fresh, nutrient-rich blood.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on your back, with your feet together and arms next to your body.

Keeping your head and neck on the floor, breathe in as you lift both legs to 90 degrees.

As you lift your hips up toward the ceiling, place your hands on your hips and walk your hands up toward your shoulder blades.

As your legs start to lift up, guide them toward your head. Slowly place your feet on the floor behind your head. Keep your knees straight, feet together, and feet flexed.

If your toes can reach the floor comfortably, you can interlock your hands on the floor behind your back.

Keeping your knees straight, gently push your heels away and breathe evenly.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Placing your hands on the floor and using them as levers, bend your knees slightly and slowly roll the back on the floor.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Knees should be kept straight if possible.

Look straight upward toward the ceiling; do not turn your head.

Hips ideally are right above your shoulders.

Shoulder blades are drawn toward each other to release pressure on your neck.

DURATION OF HOLD

Beginners : 15 – 60 seconds

Intermediate : 30 – 90 seconds

Advanced : 90 seconds – 3 minutes

A thumb-rule for the duration of Plough Pose is half the duration of Shoulderstand. So if you hold Shoulderstand for 2 minutes, stay in Plough Pose for 1 minute.

CONTRAINDICATIONS &

CAUTIONS

- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular issues
- Neck issues
- Shoulder issues
- Recent surgery or inflammation in your head region (for example ears, eyes, nose, etc.),
- Arthritis and osteoporosis
- Brain injuries
- Lower-back and spinal issues (e.g. chronic pain, herniated disc, sciatica, SI-joint instability)
- Acute migraine or headache
- Asthma or other breathing disorders: hold only for short durations. Skip altogether if it causes too much discomfort, nausea, or shortness of breath.

MODIFICATIONS

Place a folded blanket 3 – 5 cm thick underneath your shoulders to release pressure on your neck (as in Shoulderstand).

If you cannot reach the floor with your feet, try opening your feet wider apart and gently placing down one foot at a time. Otherwise support your feet on a block or against the wall. In this case, keep the support of your hands on your lower back.

Asanas for the Anahata Chakra (Heart Chakra)

4. ARDHA SETU BANDHASANA HALF BRIDGE POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Heart Chakra and therefore stimulates your heart, lungs, thymus, and lymph glands;
- stimulates your thyroid and parathyroid glands;
- slows heart beat and reduces blood pressure (if chest is raised high enough to press into the chin);
- stretches your spine in the opposite direction than in Shoulderstand and Plough Pose and therefore reverses the compression of the lumbar and thoracic regions;
- strengthens abdominal and lumbar muscles;
- rejuvenates and tones the legs and buttocks;
- stretches intercostals and can be therapeutic for asthma; and
- releases lower back tension and pain and rejuvenates tired back muscles.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on your back, bend your knees, and bring your feet close to your hips. Keep your feet hip-width apart and heels on the floor.

Place your hands by your sides, palms facing downward.

Breathe in, push your hands into the floor, and slowly lift your hips up to the ceiling.

Reach with your hands toward your ankles and bring your chest toward your chin.

Keep lifting your pelvis upward and back toward your head and breathe evenly.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Place your palms flat on the floor and vertebra-by-vertebra roll the back down toward the floor.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Keeping shoulders and head on the floor, draw your shoulder blades toward each other.

Knees should stay parallel, toes may point slightly outwards.

Knees and ankles should be in a 90-degree angle to the floor.

DURATION

Beginners : 30 seconds – 1 minute

Intermediate: 1 – 2 minutes

Advanced : 2 – 4 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

There are no general contraindications and cautions to this pose. However, respect your limit of movement and do not push further than that, as that can cause strain in your neck or knees.

MODIFICATIONS

If you cannot hold your ankles while maintaining the correct alignment, you can also

- keep your palms flat on the floor, next to your thighs, and then push your pelvis up as high as you can, or
- support your back by bringing your hands in the same position as in Shoulderstand (fingers pointing in toward your spine and thumbs up alongside your body).

5. PAWANMUKTASANA

AIR-RELEASING POSE (SUPPLEMENTARY POSE)

Air-Releasing Pose is practiced at this point in the sequence to provide a gentle counter-pose for Half Bridge Pose. It stretches the back, hips, and back of your legs, and when done properly helps to relieve excess gases from your stomach and intestines.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on your back and hug your knees to your chest.

Bring your nose to your knees, rounding your entire spine. Take deep breaths into your lower abdomen.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Lower and middle back are resting on the floor.
Tailbone and upper back are lifted off the floor in the effort to bring the nose and knees close together.

Feet and knees are parallel, and your arms are crossing over your kneecaps or shins.

DURATION

Hold for 30 seconds to 1 minute.

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Abdominal issues (e.g. diarrhea, ulcer, menstrual pains, recent surgery)

MODIFICATIONS

Keep your head on the floor if you have neck or shoulder pain.

Open your knees apart if due to tight hips or hamstrings you find it difficult to draw your knees close to your chest.

6. MATSYASANA

FISH POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Heart Chakra and therefore stimulates the heart, lungs, thymus, and lymph glands, making it esteemed as highly beneficial for boosting the immune system;
- stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands;
- encourages deep abdominal and diaphragmatic breathing and stretches the intercostals, therefore strengthening the lungs and increasing their capacity, resulting in higher athletic performance and better coping with respiratory conditions such as asthma and spasms in the bronchial tubes;
- relaxes the upper back and neck muscles;
- strengthens and tones the arm and upper back muscles; and
- reverses the compression caused by Shoulderstand, stretching the thoracic and lumbar regions of your spine in the opposite direction.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on your back—legs and feet together.

Place your hands under your hips, palms facing downward and elbows slightly outward.

Breathing in, look toward your feet and bring your weight onto your elbows.

Bring your elbows as close together as possible.

Breathing in, open your chest and drop your head back so that the crown of your head rests on the floor.

Taking deep breaths, expand your lungs and chest.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Breathe in and lift your head to look at the feet.

Breathe out and relax in Corpse Pose.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Make sure your hands are below your hips. If your hands are too high or too low, the alignment of the whole pose will be off.

Make sure that your head is resting on the floor.

Do not lean on your head. Your head should be slightly touching the floor, but the weight should be on your elbows only.

Keep your feet and legs relaxed.

Open your chest as much as possible. Breathe as deeply as possible, taking advantage of the fact that the chest is thrown wide open.

DURATION OF HOLD

Beginners : 30 seconds – 1 minute

Intermediate: 1 – 2 minutes

Advanced : 2 – 4 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Neck issues
- Acute headache
- Hypertension

MODIFICATIONS

If you feel dizzy or feel pain in your neck, you can rest your upper back or head on a cushion.

7. SUKHA GOMUKHASANA

EASY COW FACE POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Heart Chakra and therefore stimulates the heart, lungs, thymus, and lymph glands—therefore boosting the immune system;
- encourages abdominal and diaphragmatic breathing;
- stretches intercostal muscles and therefore increases lung capacity, which results in higher athletic performance and better coping with respiratory conditions such as asthma;
- helps to straighten your spine and improve overall body posture;
- improves the condition of Kyphosis (chronically hunched upper back or rounded shoulders); and
- removes tension in your shoulders as well as in your upper and middle back.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Sit on your knees, with your hips resting on your heels.

Extend your right arm to the side, bend your elbow, and place your hand in between your shoulder blades, palm facing away.

Lift your left arm over your head and bend your elbow to place your left palm in between your shoulder blades (palm touching the back).

Clasp your hands behind your back, in between your shoulder blades.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Gently release the grip of your hands, roll your shoulders, and proceed to the other side.

ALIGNMENT CUES

The back of your neck should be kept as straight as possible.

Your lower back should arch only slightly (retaining its natural curve).

Try to keep the elbow of your upper arm behind your head.

DURATION

Beginners: 30 seconds – 1 minute per side

Intermediate: 1 – 2 minutes per side

Advanced: 3 – 5 minutes per side

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Shoulder issues
- Knee issues: To decrease strain on knees, support your hips on a cushion or keep your legs stretched out in front of you.

MODIFICATIONS

If both hands are on your spine, but do not touch, hold on to a strap or towel to provide resistance.

If your lower hand does not reach to the center of your spine, do not attempt to clasp the hand. Instead gently clasp your elbow with the opposite hand and work on the rotation in the shoulder.

If sitting on your heels is not comfortable, use a block or cushion underneath your hips.

Asanas for the Manipura Chakra (Solar Plexus Chakra)

8. PASCHIMOTTANASANA

SEATED FORWARD BEND

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Solar Plexus Chakra and therefore stimulates and balances the functions of the stomach, gallbladder, liver, spleen, and pancreas;
- improves digestion and elimination of toxins;
- increases peristalsis and combats constipation through the squeeze-and-release effect;
- regulates blood sugar levels, through regulating pancreas function;
- helps to balance the menstrual cycle and to improve blood circulation to the pelvic region, therefore helping to relieve symptoms caused by menopause and menstruation;
- slightly increases blood pressure toward your head and has a calming effect on the brain and mind and helps to relieve stress and anxiety;
- stretches the entire spine, especially the lumbar and thoracic spine, and therefore improves blood circulation in the back region and tones the spinal nerves; and
- improves flexibility of the lower back, hips, and hamstrings.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Sit with your legs together and straight in front of you.

Make sure you are sitting high up on your sitting bones.

Inhale and reach with both arms toward the ceiling, arms parallel to your ears.

As you exhale, keep on reaching forward, and bend forward, reaching with your hands toward your toes.

Bring your nose to your knees. If you are unable to reach your toes, hold your ankles, shins, or even your knees. Rest your elbows on the floor.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Breathe in and slowly roll up, vertebrae by vertebrae, shoulders and head coming up last.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Make sure you are sitting high up on your sitting bones, avoid rolling back toward your tailbone.

Knees are straight, feet together and relaxed.

Hands are holding calves, ankles, or heels—wherever they reach comfortably. Keep your arms and shoulders relaxed and use your breath to move deeper in the pose. Do not use your arms to pull yourself downward.

Your elbows are resting on the floor or relaxing toward the floor.

Your back is rounded.

Your head and neck are relaxed. Reach with your forehead toward your knees or shins, and if possible rest it against your legs. (If necessary, you can use a prop to rest your head on for longer holds.)

DURATION

Beginners : 1 – 2 minutes

Intermediate: 2 – 4 minutes

Advanced: 4 – 10 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Abdominal issues (e.g. diarrhea, ulcer, menstrual pains, recent surgery)
- Lower-back and spinal issues (e.g. chronic pain, herniated disc, sciatica, SI-joint instability)
- Hypertension: Keep your head elevated above heart level.

MODIFICATIONS

If you are suffering from a herniated or compressed disc in the lower or middle back, or any other spinal issues (e.g. Sciatica, SI-Joint instability) be careful with this pose. If you are allowed to do forward bends by your physician, work on creating the movement from your pelvis and keep your spine as straight as possible (so do not round your nose to your knee.)

If the lower back is tight, you can open your legs hip-width apart.

For tight hamstrings, you can bend your knees and support them with a block or folded blanket.

9. PURVOTTANASANA

UPWARD PLANK POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- works as a counter-pose to seated forward bends and increases the effect of these poses by increasing the blood flow to the stomach, gallbladder, liver, spleen, and pancreas;
- gives a gentle backbend to your entire spine, especially in the thoracic spine (chest-opener);
- tones arms, shoulders, and wrists; and
- increases core strength.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Sit with your legs straight in front of you.

Keep your hands next to your hips, fingers facing backward.

Pulling your shoulders to your ears, open your chest, lean back, and place your hands flat on the floor.

As you breathe in, point your feet, push your hips upward, open your chest, and gently drop your head backward.

Keep pushing your pelvis up toward the ceiling, feet into the floor, and allow your shoulders to roll back and your chest to expand.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Breathing in, look at your feet as you bring your hips down. Then lie down on your stomach in Crocodile Pose.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Activate your inner thighs to keep your legs parallel and close together.

Open your chest to the maximum and take deep breaths.

Your wrists and shoulders should be in one vertical line when you are in the pose. Make sure that when you are in the pose, your shoulders are not further back than your wrists, because this can strain your wrists. Also make sure that your shoulders are not in front of your wrists, this will limit the movement.

DURATION

Beginners : 10 – 20 seconds

Intermediate: 20 – 40 seconds

Advanced: 40 – 90 seconds

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Wrist issues
- Shoulder issues
- Neck issues
- Hypertension and hypotension

MODIFICATIONS

If you have hyper-extended elbows, turn your fingertips toward your feet.

If releasing your head backward is too heavy on your neck, causes dizziness, or is just not comfortable, you can look toward the ceiling.

10. BHUJANGASANA

COBRA POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates Manipura Chakra and therefore stimulates and balances the functions of your stomach, gallbladder, liver, spleen, and pancreas;
- tones all digestive organs and improves digestion, through abdominal pressure;
- increases bodily heat and therefore digestive fire;
- stimulates the contraction in your intestines and therefore helps to relieve constipation;
- regulates blood sugar levels, through regulating the function of the pancreas;
- tones and strengthens your lower-back muscles, therefore having a positive effect on chronic lower-back pain;
- tones your buttocks and inner thighs;
- stretches the thoracic region of your spine by expanding the rib cage;
- relieves hunchback and improves posture;
- tones your ovaries and uterus and can reduce menstruation problems;
- helps to reestablish a proper lumbar curve and can therefore be beneficial for sciatica; and
- reduces fatigue and lethargy.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on your abdomen, with your legs and feet together, forehead on the floor.

Position your palms on the floor, next to your chest. Elbows are tucked in toward your body and pointing upward.

Breathe in, pushing your navel into the floor, and raise your head and chest off the floor.

Take easy, relaxed breaths as you hold the pose.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Exhale and gently lower your upper body and head to the floor. Relax in Crocodile Pose.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Keep your lower stomach, pelvis, and legs on the floor.

Squeeze your legs together, heels together.

Shoulders are down and away from your ears.

Keep your hands slightly off the floor.

DURATION

Beginners : 30 seconds – 1 minute

Intermediate : 1 – 2 minutes

Advanced : 2 – 3 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Abdominal issues (e.g. diarrhea, ulcer, menstrual pains, recent surgery)
- Cardiovascular issues
- Lower-back and spinal issues (e.g. chronic pain, herniated disc, sciatica, SI-joint instability)

MODIFICATIONS

If you have chronic lower-back issues or even a herniated disc, a modified version of this pose might work well for you: Keep your hands on the floor and use them as support. You can even bring your elbows on the floor just below your shoulders. It is important that you stabilize your back by engaging your core. Suck your belly button toward your spine as you hold the pose. Keep your shoulder blades drawn away from your ears toward your waist and look straight ahead.

11. SHALABHASANA

LOCUST POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Solar Plexus Chakra and therefore stimulates and balances the functions of your stomach, gallbladder, liver, spleen, and pancreas;
- tones all digestive organs and improves digestion, through abdominal pressure;
- produces bodily heat and increases digestive fire;
- helps to control blood sugar levels through stimulating your pancreas;
- strengthens the biceps and deltoid muscles of your upper arms;
- strengthens your abdominal and lumbar muscles;
- strengthens and tones your buttocks and legs;
- stimulates your reproductive system;
- improves concentration and helps to relieve stress; and
- relieves hunchback and corrects posture.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie on your side, interlock your hands tightly in front of you, and push them downward, below your pelvis (keeping your elbows as close as possible).

Roll over to lie on your chest and look forward, chin on the floor.

Keep your feet hip-width or even wider apart.

Inhale and lift both legs off the floor as high as possible, pushing your shoulders and arms into the floor.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Breathe out and gently lower your legs to the floor. Release your hands and relax into Crocodile Pose.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Elbows and wrists are as close as possible.

Shoulders are rolled inward.

If you feel pain in your arms or elbows you can place a rolled blanket under your elbows.

If you feel tension in your neck or cannot place your chin flat on the floor, you can place a blanket underneath your chest.

You can modify your hand position as follows: making two fists next to each other or hands flat next to each other palms facing downward.

DURATION

Beginners : 10 seconds

Intermediate : 10 – 20 seconds

Advanced : 20 – 40 seconds

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Abdominal issues (e.g. diarrhea, ulcer, menstrual pains, recent surgery)
- Shoulder issues
- Cardiovascular issues
- Neck Issues

MODIFICATIONS

This is quite an intense and difficult pose. To build up toward it, you can first practice Half Locust Pose, as explained in the variations section further on in the book.

12. DHANURASANA

BOW POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Solar Plexus Chakra and therefore stimulates and balances the functions of your stomach, gallbladder, liver, spleen, and pancreas;
- tones all digestive organs and improves digestion, through abdominal pressure;
- produces bodily heat and increases digestive fire;
- tones, strengthens, and massages your lower-back muscles and therefore acts as a remedy to chronic lower-back pain;
- stretches and lengthens your abdominal muscles, psoas, and quadriceps;
- relieves hunchback and improves overall posture;
- opens your chest, stretches your intercostals, and therefore increases lung capacity and efficiency;
- increases mobility in your shoulder joints;
- improves rheumatism of your hip, knee joints, and hands;
- compresses your entire spine and rejuvenates your intervertebral discs and your central nervous system;
- stimulates reproductive organs, providing relief for women who regularly suffer from menstrual cramps;
- releases tension in shoulders and neck and therefore is beneficial for those suffering from tension headaches;
- helps to combat stress, anxiety, and fatigue; and
- increases vitality, concentration, and willpower.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Lie down on your abdomen, with your forehead on the floor, knees shoulder-width apart.

Bend your knees and hold the ankles from the outside, with elbows straight.

Breathe in, push your feet into your hands, lift your chest and knees, and look diagonally upward.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Breathe out and gently lower your chest and knees to the floor. Then release the grip on your ankles and lie down in Crocodile Pose.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Elbows are straight. Use the opposing force of your feet kicking against your hands to lift yourself higher up.

Aim to keep your weight on your abdomen and bring your chest and knees into one line parallel to the floor.

Keep your neck extended from your spine. If flexibility allows, look diagonally upward, otherwise gaze forward.

DURATION

Beginners : 10 – 20 seconds

Intermediate : 20 – 40 seconds

Advanced : 40 seconds – 1 minute

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Abdominal issues (e.g. diarrhea, ulcer, menstrual pains, recent surgery)
- Shoulder issues
- Knee issues
- Cardiovascular issues

MODIFICATIONS

If you have difficulties holding on to both ankles, you can practice Half Bow Pose, as explained in the variations section further on in the book.

13. ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

HALF LORD-OF-THE-FISHES POSE (AKA HALF SPINAL TWIST)

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Solar Plexus Chakra and therefore stimulates and balances the functions of your stomach, gallbladder, liver, spleen, and pancreas;
- stimulates the functioning of your liver, having a detoxifying effect;
- aligns your spine as the ligaments attached to your spine stretch;
- rejuvenates and energizes your spine by massaging your intervertebral discs and causing more nutrients to diffuse into the discs as well as stimulating the production of growth factors limited by aging;
- relieves back pain and stiffness from between your vertebrae;
- stimulates your pelvic region, providing a fresh blood supply to the reproductive organs and urinary system;
- massages your abdominal organs and increases your digestive juices;
- stimulates the functioning of your pancreas, and therefore balances blood sugar levels;
- relieves tension that may have built up in your back from forward-bending and backbending asanas;
- opens your chest and increases the oxygen supply to the lungs and therefore can have a therapeutic effect for asthma;
- relieves stiffness in your hip joints; and
- releases tensions in your arms, shoulders, upper back, and neck.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Sit with your legs stretched out in front of you.

Bend your right leg, bring the heel to your left hip, and make sure both hips are on the floor.

Cross your left foot over your right knee and place it on the floor.

Place your left hand behind your spine, palm flat on the floor (if possible).

Reach up with your right hand, bringing your right elbow to the outside of your left knee. If flexibility allows, you can hold onto your left ankle.

Twist gently toward your left, looking over your shoulder.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Gently turn back, release your arms and unwind your legs. Then repeat on the other side.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Keep both sitting bones on the floor, if necessary moving your lower heel out a bit.

Keep shoulders above hips, but do not lean on the hand behind you back.

Keep reaching out with the crown of your head, keeping your spine as erect as possible and the back of your neck elongated.

DURATION

Beginners : 1 minute per side

Intermediate : 1 – 2 minutes per side

Advanced : 2 – 3 minutes per side

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Lower-back and spinal issues (e.g. chronic pain, herniated disc, sciatica, SI-joint instability)
- Abdominal issues (e.g. diarrhea, ulcer, menstrual pains, recent surgery)

MODIFICATIONS

In case of any chronic back issue such as herniated disc, sciatica, or SI-Joint issues, twisting should be approached with consideration. The focus should be more on keeping the lower spine relatively straight and creating a gentle twist more in the thoracic part of the spine.

If, due to tightness in your lower back or hips it is not possible to keep both sitting bones on the floor, straighten your lower leg.

Asanas for the Svadhishthana Chakra (Sacral Chakra)

14. SUKHA KAKASANA

EASY CROW POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner, within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Sacral Chakra and therefore stimulates and balances the functions of your urinary tract, kidneys, and gonads;
- develops strength in shoulders, arms, and wrists;
- benefits the circulatory system in the upper limbs and torso;
- opens the chest and stretches inter-costal muscles, therefore increasing lung capacity;
- increases core awareness, balance, and coordination;
- stretches and at the same time strengthens the groin and inner thighs;
- increases focus and concentration;
- removes fatigue; and
- increases vitality and willpower.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Sit on your toes, with heels (almost) together and knees apart.

Place your elbows in the crease of your knees (the fleshy part between lower and upper legs).

Keep your hands slightly higher than your knees, fingers spread widely and fingertips slightly pointed inwards.

Maintain this alignment as you shift your weight forward, placing your palms (shoulder-width) on the floor.

Focusing your eyes on a point half a meter in front of your fingertips on the floor, slowly lift your feet off the floor, one foot at a time.

Pulling both feet toward your hips, keep looking at a point on the floor, approximately 1 foot in front of your fingertips.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Shifting your weight backward, with control, place your feet on the floor and release your hands.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Keep your core active, by continuously lifting your heels up toward your buttocks.

Keep your back slightly rounded.

The angle between your hand and forearm should be 90 degrees. If it is not, lift your wrist slightly higher by placing a blanket underneath the lower part of your palm (so the upper part of palm and fingers are lower than the lower part of your palm and root of your thumb).

DURATION

Beginners : 10 – 20 seconds

Intermediate : 20 – 40 seconds

Advanced : 40 seconds – 1 minute

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Wrist issues
- Shoulder issues
- Knee issues
- Groin and hamstring issues
- Cardiovascular issues
- Hypertension

MODIFICATIONS

If balancing is challenging initially, you can press the forehead against a cushion on the floor to practice the weight shift.

15. TRIKONASANA

TRIANGLE POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Sacral Chakra and therefore balances the functions of your urinary tract, kidneys, and gonads;
- stimulates your liver and spleen and therefore helps to detoxify;
- gives a lateral stretch to your spine and your back muscles;
- realigns your spine, relieving and correcting scoliosis;
- increases blood flow and nutrient supply to inter-vertebral disks, keeping your spine young and supple;
- tones and strengthens your abdominals and back muscles; and improves balance and concentration.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Stand straight, with your feet shoulder-width apart.

As you inhale, bring your arms up next to your ears and reach upward, extending and lengthening your spine.

Place your palms together, making sure that your hands stay in a straight line above your forehead.

As you exhale, press your right heel into the floor and reach up and out to your left side.

Extend your entire torso to your left, initiating the movement at the base of your spine and keeping both sides of your torso elongated.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Inhale and return to the standing position. Relax your arms for a moment, then repeat on the other side.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Keep your feet parallel and your hips square. Do not allow the hip to “pop” out to one side.

Make sure not to collapse at the ribcage, but keep reaching up and out.

Your hands are neither right above your head nor in front of your head. They are placed so that the roots of your thumbs are directly in line with your forehead, reaching up at the same time.

Shoulders will lift up, but make sure to keep the back of your neck elongated.

DURATION

Beginners : 20 – 30 seconds each side

Intermediate : 30 – 45 seconds each side

Advanced : 45 – 90 seconds each side

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

There are no general contraindications for this pose, if practiced correctly. But this pose, even though it looks simple, is quite heavy. If you feel dizzy or start to sweat heavily, release the pose.

Asanas for the Muladhara Chakra (Root Chakra)

16. VRKSHASANA

TREE POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates the Root Chakra and therefore balances the functions of the large intestines and adrenals;
- strengthens your spine and improves balance and poise;
- helps in neuro-muscular coordination;
- strengthens and tones you ankles, knees, legs, and buttocks;

- strengthens the tendons and the ligaments of your feet (helps to reduce the effects of flat feet);
- loosens the hip joints, groin, and inner thighs;
- has a grounding and calming effect as it improves physical and mental balance; and
- improves concentration and the mental faculties.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Stand straight, with your feet together.

Raise your hands above your head and place your palms together, keeping them in line with your forehead.

Inhale, and raise your right foot and place it against your left, inner thigh.

Keep your focus on a point slightly above eye level (approximately 2 meters away) and breathe evenly.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Gently bring your hands down. Release your right foot to the floor and repeat to the other side.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Your foot should ideally be placed against the opposite inner thigh.

Your hands are reaching toward the ceiling. Make sure to keep the roots of your thumbs in line with your forehead, not over your head and not in front of your face.

Your elbows are slightly bent, and your shoulders lifted only slightly.

The knee of your upper foot is pointing sideways, rotating the leg at the hip joint without lifting your hip up.

Your spine is in a natural curve. Make sure not to “hang” into the lower back and not to lift the chest.

DURATION

Beginners : 30 seconds – 1 minute each side

Intermediate : 1 – 3 minutes each side

Advanced : 3 – 5 minutes each side

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

- Ankle issues
- Knee issues

MODIFICATIONS

Make sure to rotate the working leg at the hip and place it wherever it reaches along the standing leg. You should not feel strain in the ankle or knee joint. The lifted foot can also be placed along the ankle or lower leg or along the inside of your knee (making sure to place the arch of the foot against the side of your knee, not the heel or ball of your foot).

If you feel strain in arms or shoulders, keep your hands in the Prayer Position in front of your chest instead of reaching them up toward the ceiling.

For anyone who might be in danger of losing balance and falling, it is recommended to practice this pose close to a wall and to take support if necessary.

17. TADASANA

MOUNTAIN POSE

BENEFITS

Regular practice in a steady and comfortable manner within a balanced yoga asana program

- stimulates Muladhara Chakra and therefore balances the functions of your large intestines and adrenals;
- strengthens your spine and improves balance and poise;
- helps in neuro-muscular coordination;
- increases strength, power, and mobility in your feet, ankles, thighs, and hips;
- strengthens the tendons and the ligaments of the feet (helping to reduce the effects of flat feet);
- improves overall posture;
- improves the harmony between your right and left sides of your body;
- activates and rejuvenates your entire body;
- harmonizes your body and mind; and
- improves concentration and mental faculties.



HOW TO COME INTO THE POSE

Stand straight, with the toes and heels of your feet together.

Extend your arms to the ceiling, palms together, keeping your hands in line with your forehead.

Look up in between your palms and close your eyes.

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Gently bring your palms in front of your chest and open your eyes.

ALIGNMENT CUES

Both feet are together, toes and heels touching each other.

Arms are above your head, in line with your forehead.

Elbows are slightly bent, shoulders lifted only slightly.

Chin is slightly lifted, without dropping your head backward.

Eyes are closed and the entire focus is on standing as still and stable as possible, avoiding any weight shift and movement.

DURATION

Beginners : 30 – 60 seconds

Intermediate : 1 – 2 minutes

Advanced : 2 – 4 minutes

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

There are no general contraindications for this pose. This pose, even though it looks simple, becomes heavy after 30 seconds. If you feel dizzy or start to sweat heavily, release the pose.

MODIFICATIONS

If closing your eyes provokes a sense of dizziness or struggle for balance, keep your eyes open and simply look at the eye-shaped space in between your palms.

If looking up results in tension or pain in your neck or shoulder, look straight forward and close your eyes.

Overview I: The Basic Sequence

1	Initial Relaxation	5 min.
2	(Chanting Om)	
3	Kapalabhati Skull-Shining Breath	3 rounds (5 min.)
4	Anulom Vilom Alternate Nostril Breathing	5 min.
5	Shavasana Corpse Pose	30 – 45 sec.
6	Surya Namaskara Sun Salutation	6 – 8 rounds (10 min.)
7	Shavasana Corpse Pose	1 min.
8	Leg Raises	6 – 10 rep.
9	Shashankasana Child's Pose	30 – 45 sec.
10	Dolphin	10 rep.
11	Shashankasana Child's Pose	30 – 45 sec.
12	Shirshasana Headstand Pose	1 min.
13	Shashankasana Child's Pose	30 – 45 sec.
14	Salamba Sarvangasana Shoulderstand Pose	1 min.
15	Halasana Plough Pose	30 sec.
16	Ardha Setu Bandhasana Half Bridge Pose	30 sec.
17	Pawanmuktasana Air Release Pose	30 – 45 sec.
18	Matsyasana Fish Pose	30 sec.

19	Shavasana Corpse Pose	30 – 45 sec.
20	Sukha Gomukhasana Easy Cow Face Pose	1 min. each side
21	Paschimottanasana Seated Forward Bend Pose	1 min.
22	Purvottanasana Upward Plank Pose	10 sec.
23	Makarasana Crocodile Pose	30 – 45 sec.
24	Bhujangasana Cobra Pose	30 – 60 sec.
25	Makarasana Crocodile Pose	30 – 45 sec.
26	Shalabhasana Locust Pose	10 – 20 sec.
27	Makarasana Crocodile Pose	30 – 45 sec.
28	Dhanurasana Bow Pose	10 – 20 sec.
29	Shashankasana Child's Pose	30 – 45 sec.
30	Ardha Matsyendrasana Half Spinal Twist	30 sec. each side
31	Sukha Kakasana Easy Crow Pose	30 sec.
32	Trikonasana Triangle Pose	30 sec. each side
33	Vrkshasana Tree Pose	1 min. each side
34	Tadasana Mountain Pose	1 min.
35	Final Relaxation	15 min.
36	(Chanting Om Shanti)	

* The durations mentioned do not take in account the time needed for explanation, instructions, and getting into the pose. The timings as displayed above, plus approximately 10 – 15 minutes extra, are suitable for a 90-minute basic Hatha Yoga class.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



RAM JAIN

Ram is the Founding Director of the Arhanta Yoga Ashrams (India and The Netherlands). Within the last 10 years, the Arhanta Yoga Ashrams have become renowned internationally for their professional yoga teacher training courses, and have up to present trained over 3000 yoga teachers from all over the world.

Born in New Delhi, India, in a traditional and spiritual family, his yoga and Vedic philosophy education started at the age of eight years as a part of his primary school education. He has in-depth knowledge of classical Hatha Yoga and is also well versed in ancient Indian scriptures.

During his 19 years of teaching career, he has worked with various anatomy and physiology experts and has developed unique teaching, adjustment, and modification techniques.

Presently, he is the lead teacher for various teacher training programs, ranging from Hatha Yoga, Yin Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, to Meditation and Yoga Nidra. He teaches for several months a year in India and the rest of the year in the Netherlands, where he also lives with his wife and two children.



KALYANI HAUSWIRTH-JAIN

Kalyani is a senior teacher & Creative Director at the Arhanta Yoga Ashrams since 2013. She was born and raised in Switzerland. Since early adolescence she has been fascinated by art, bodywork, the body-mind connection. The mother of two children now, she has been teaching yoga for over 10 years, training yoga teachers for more than eight years at the Arhanta Yoga Ashrams in India and the Netherlands.

Starting off with physical challenges, she transformed her body, mastering many advanced asanas with her regular practice and discipline. By following a diligent self-practice, working with many different teachers, styles, and techniques, she gained a profound understanding of physiology and movement techniques.

This, in combination with her extensive teaching experience, gave her an understanding of the importance of structure and sequencing for a holistic yoga asana practice.

ABOUT ARHANTA YOGA ASHRAMS

At Arhanta Yoga ® our mission is to provide internationally accredited professional yoga courses and training in a non-sectarian way, while maintaining the authenticity of the ancient teachings. Since 2009 more than 3000 yoga teachers have graduated from Arhanta Yoga Ashrams.

Arhanta Yoga Ashrams are Registered Yoga School (RYS) with Yoga Alliance, International Yoga Federation, European Yoga Association and CRKBO (The Netherlands). Our courses meet and exceed the international standards of 200 hours and our certification is accepted by all major yoga institutions, yoga federations and insurance companies.

The 200 hour Yoga Teacher Training is our foundational course for becoming a yoga teacher. This course is an intensive training to become a professional and worldwide accredited yoga teacher in 26 days. The course is designed only with one goal – to make you a confident yoga teacher.

It is a proven and tested course which has been developed and refined over the period of last 10 years.

After the course you will be able to teach yoga with confidence and proper certification. This is our guarantee!

COURSE HIGHLIGHTS

During our 200 hour yoga teacher training course you will

- benefit from a well-rounded, time-proven curriculum: 170 Hatha Yoga asanas, in-depth yogic philosophy, extensive yoga anatomy, daily pranayama & meditation and much more;
- become confident to teach with 60 hours hands-on teaching practice;
- acquire expert teaching skills as you learn how to give proper instructions, and how to apply corrections and modification techniques;
- learn how to sequence yoga postures to create classes featuring various goals and themes;
- learn how to teach people of different ages, backgrounds and body types;
- receive a worldwide accredited yoga teacher certification in 26 intensive days;
- be fully immersed into the yogic lifestyle as you study at a traditional yoga ashram; and
- receive guidance for how to start your own yoga school / yoga studio.

Most of our students are surprised on how much they could learn in such a short period. And once you have completed the course, we are still there for you with our post-course support and mentoring:

FOR ANY QUESTIONS AND GUIDANCE:

We provide a top notch post course support to all of our students. Our teachers can be easily contacted via phone, email and instant messaging regarding any questions about teaching, philosophy or your personal yoga practice.

FOR TEACHING / ASSISTING OPPORTUNITIES:

We provide two kinds of intern opportunities to all of our students. You can come as a volunteer to work in our team for a period of 1-3 months, or you can come as a trainee for period of 3-6 months. Both opportunities will help you develop your teaching skills and confidence even further.

FOR STARTING YOUR TEACHING CAREER:

Every student is provided guidance in finding a yoga teacher job or starting up their own yoga studio. Our years of experience in running yoga schools and centers is available to all our graduates. We help them with advice ranging from market research website setup to renewal systems.

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