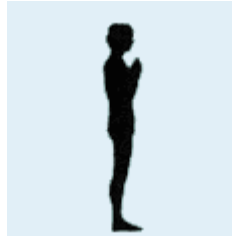


Yoga Postures Step-by-Step

1. The Sun salutation - *Suryanamaskar*



Posture: *Surya-namaskar* - Sun Salutation

Translation: The Sanskrit word *surya* means sun. Namaskar is the Hindi word for Namaste, from the root *nam*, to bow. Namaskar means salutation, salute, greeting or praise.

Pronunciation: soor-yee-ah-nahma-skar

Difficulty: (3)

STEP ONE:



Stand facing the direction of the sun with both feet touching. Bring the hands together, palm-to-palm, at the heart.

STEP TWO:



Inhale and raise the arms upward. Slowly bend backward, stretching arms above the head.

STEP THREE:



Exhale slowly bending forward, touching the earth with respect until the hands are in line with the feet, head touching knees.

STEP FOUR:



Inhale and move the right leg back away from the body in a wide backward step. Keep the hands and feet firmly on the ground, with the left foot between the hands. Raise the head.

STEP FIVE:



While exhaling, bring the left foot together with the right. Keep arms straight, raise the hips and align the head with the arms, forming an upward arch.

STEP SIX:



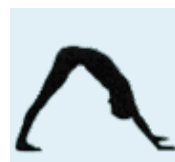
Exhale and lower the body to the floor until the feet, knees, hands, chest, and forehead are touching the ground.

STEP SEVEN:



Inhale and slowly raise the head and bend backward as much as possible, bending the spine to the maximum (as in the [naga-asana](#)).

STEP EIGHT:



While exhaling, bring the left foot together with the right. Keep arms straight, raise the hips and align the head with the arms, forming an upward arch.

STEP NINE:

Inhale and move the right leg back away from the body in a wide backward step. Keep the hands and feet firmly on the ground, with the left foot between the hands. Raise the head.

STEP TEN:

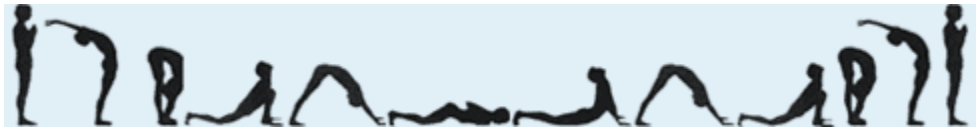
Exhale slowly bending forward, touching the earth with respect until the hands are in line with the feet, head touching knees.

STEP ELEVEN:

Inhale and raise the arms upward. Slowly bend backward, stretching arms above the head.

STEP TWELVE:

Stand facing the direction of the sun with both feet touching. Bring the hands together, palm-to-palm, at the heart.



2. Akarna-Dhanura-asana – The Shooting – bow - Pose



Posture: *Akarna-dhanura-asana*
The Shooting-bow Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *karna* means ear and the prefix "a" means near to or towards. *Dhanur* means bow-shaped, curved or bent. The "bow" here referred to is a bow as in "bow and arrow." Literally we could translate this as the near-the-ear bow posture but because of the obvious appearance of the posture we'll call it the shooting bow posture.

Pronunciation: ah-car-nah da-noor ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (6) Requires flexibility of hips and legs.

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs then inhale deeply.
2. Exhale and reach down and loop the forefinger of the right hand around the big toe of the right foot and grasp the left foot with the left hand.
3. Inhale and pull the right foot back placing the big toe next to the right ear. Straighten the back as much as possible and hold the posture for the duration of the inhale breath.
4. Exhale and return to the seated position of step #1 then repeat the posture on the opposite side.

"Having caught the toes of the feet with both hands and carried them to the ears by drawing the body like a bow, it becomes *Dhanura-asana*."

The Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika I.27.

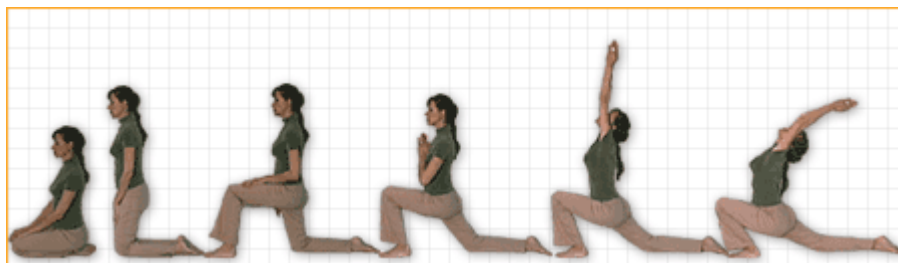
Comments:

While practicing this posture imagine yourself as an archer with the gaze focused on the target and the arrow firmly yet gracefully being pulled back in the bow. Hold the posture steady as an archer would hold the arrow aimed at its target. Return the foot to the floor gently. This simple technique will help cultivate a focused and unwavering attention.

Variations:

Reverse the hands and feet so that that the right hand pulls the left foot to the left ear and vice versa. The foot gets pulled under the outstretched arm.

3. Anjanaya-asana – The Salutation Pose

**Posture: Anjanaya-asana - The Salutation Pose**

Translation: The Sanskrit word *anjaneya* means salutation or praise from the root *anj* which means to honor, to celebrate, to anoint.

Pronunciation: Ahn-jah-nay-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (7)

Instructions:

1. Sit comfortably in the *vajra-asana* (thunderbolt pose).
2. Kneel up on your knees until your back, buttocks and thighs are aligned.
3. Extend your left foot forward bending your left knee at about a 90 degree angle.
4. Place the palms of your hands together at the heart in the *anjali-mudra*.
5. Raise your arms straight up keeping the palms together while bending the head backward and looking up.
6. Slowly bend backward stretching the arms backward and straightening out the right leg. Hold this position for as long as comfortable while breathing gently through the nostrils.

7. Come back to the *vajara-asana* (thunderbolt pose) then reverse the posture by alternating legs.

Comments:

The *anjaneya-asana* combines several postures and *mudras* (gestures) in a fluid, evolving flow that combines motion, stretching and holds. It delivers great benefits for the back, arms, chest, legs and hips. Regular practice will strengthen concentration and improve balance.

Perform this posture with a sense of reverence and praise. Take a moment to reside in silence and peace as your hands are held at the heart in the gesture (*mudra*) of salutation (*anjali-mudra*). Keep the intention of praise in mind as you extend your arms skyward. Feel your entire body-mind-heart extending outward in recognition of the sacredness of life.

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat twice on each side.

4. Ardha-chandra-asana – The Half – moon Pose



Posture: *Ardha-chandra-asana* - The Half-moon Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *ardha* means "half," and the word *chandra* means "moon," thus, this is the "half moon" posture.

Pronunciation: ard-ha-chun-drah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

Instructions:

1. Stand in the *tada-asana* (Stand with both feet touching from the heel to the big toe, keeping the back straight and the arms pressed slightly against the sides with palms facing inward).
2. Bring the hands together at the chest with palms lightly pressed against each other (the *Anjali-mudra*).
3. Inhale and raise the arms straight up keeping the palms pressed lightly together.
4. Arch your body backwards keeping your arms alongside your neck and head, tilt the head backward and hold. Keep your knees straight while holding posture.
5. Slowly return to the *tada-asana*.

Comments:

The *ardha-chandra-asana* is a basic stretching and balancing pose that benefits principally the lower back, abdomen and chest. It is equally suitable for use in your stretching routine as well as formal *asana* practice.

This pose is also one of the postures that are sequenced in *surya-namaskar* (the Sun Salutation).

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat *ardha-chandra-asana* two to three times.

5. Ardha-matsyendra-asana – The Half Spinal Twist Pose**Posture: Ardha-matsyendra-asana
The Half Spinal Twist Pose**

Translation: *Ardha* means half. *Matsyendra* is one of many Siddhas or masters who were accomplished Yogis mentioned in the medieval Yoga text the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*. This posture is traditionally called the Spinal Twist because the spinal column is twisted gently.

Pronunciation: ard-ha-mat-syen-drah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

"Keeping the abdominal region at ease like the back, bending the left leg, place it on the right thigh; then place on this the elbow of the right hand, and place the face on the palm of the right hand, and fix the gaze between the eye-brows. This is called *Matsyendra*-posture."

Hatha-yoga-pradipika I.37

Instructions:

- Sit in any comfortable cross-legged position.
1. Straighten the legs out in front. Bend the right knee and bring the heel of the right foot close to the left hip.
 2. Inhale and bend the left knee upward and place the left foot flat on the floor to the right of the right leg with the ankle touching the right thigh.
 3. While turning the spine to the left straighten the right arm bringing it around to the outside of the left knee and grasp the left foot with the right hand.
 4. Turn your head as far as possible to the left and bend the left arm behind your back. Keep your spine, neck and head aligned and continue to exert effort at turning to the left.
 5. Repeat the posture the other side by reversing directions 2-6.

Comments:

The Half Spinal Twist is one of the best Yoga postures for cultivating flexibility and strength in the spine. It soothes stiff necks and upper back tension caused by stress, poor posture, or prolonged periods of sitting in one position.

The alternating compression and release of the abdominal region flushes this area with blood and massages the internal organs. Muscles of the stomach and hips are also toned from repeated practice of the Half Spinal Twist.

Duration/Repetitions:

The posture can be held for as long as you are comfortable. (One repetition consists of performing the posture on each side. Two to three full repetitions should be done at each session.

6. Baddha-kona-asana – The Restrained Angle Pose

**Posture: *Baddha-kona-asana*
The Restrained Angle Pose**

Translation: The Sanskrit word *baddha* means a bond, chain, caught or restrained. The word *pada* means foot, and *kona* means corner or angle therefore this is the restrained-foot-angle posture.

Pronunciation: ba-dah-cone-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs then inhale deeply.
2. Exhale and bend the knees drawing the feet toward the torso.
3. Place the soles of the feet together, clasp the hands over the feet interlocking the fingers pulling the feet closer and placing the heels against the perineum. The outer edge and small toe of each foot should touch the floor.
4. Lower the knees to the floor and keep the back straight. Use the elbows to press down on the thighs if necessary to bring the calves and knees to the floor. Hold the posture breathing gently through the nostrils.
5. Release the posture and sit with the legs extended out and hands on the thighs.

Comments:

Regular practice of the *baddhakona-asana* stretches the knees and stimulates circulation in the legs. It should be practiced frequently until one is comfortable sitting in the *padma-asana*. The main areas of the body that are stimulated, besides the legs, are the stomach, pelvis and lower back. It is said to keep the kidneys, prostate and bladder healthy. The *baddha-konasana* is one of the few postures that can be practiced comfortably soon after eating.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture from thirty seconds to two minutes depending on comfort. Repeat two or three times.

7. Bala-asana – The Child Pose**Posture: Bala-asana - The Child Pose**

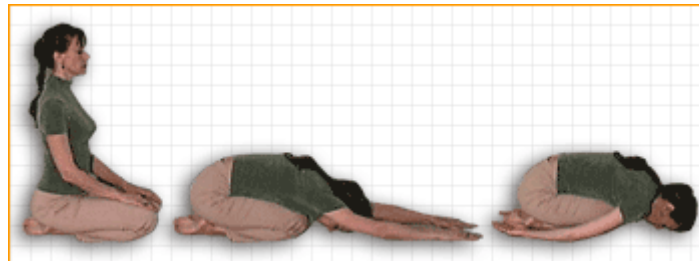
Translation: The Sanskrit word *bala* means child.

Pronunciation: ba-lah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

"As innumerable cups full of water, many reflections of the sun are seen, but the sun is the same; similarly individuals, like cups, are innumerable, but spirit, like the sun, is one."

The Shiva-samhita I.35 II.42-43.

**Instructions:**

1. Sit on your knees with your feet together and buttocks resting on your heels. Separate your knees about the width of your hips. Place your hands on your thighs, palms down. (This is the *vajra-asana* or Thunderbolt Pose).
2. Inhale deeply, then exhale as you bring your chest between your knees while swinging your arms forward.
3. Rest your forehead on the floor, if possible, and then bring your arms around to your sides until the hands are resting on either side of your feet, palms up.
4. Breathe gently through your nostrils as you hold the posture. Hold for about one to two minutes. Then return to an upright kneeling position with your back straight and your hands on your thighs.
5. Repeat the posture at least one more time.

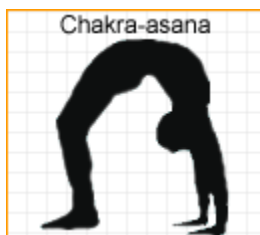
Comments:

The *bala-asana* is one of the more relaxing Yoga postures and can easily be done by beginners. As part of your Yoga routine it is best used as a counter-pose to any posture that stretch the spine backward (such as the [naga-asana](#), the [dhanura-asana](#), the [chakra-asana](#), the [ushtra-asana](#), etc.)

The *bala-asana* gently stretches and relaxes the shoulders, neck, back muscles and thighs.

Duration/Repetitions:

The *bala-asana* can be held for as long as is comfortable. Repeat at least twice if it is held for less than a minute.

8. Chakra-asana**Posture: Chakra-asana
The Wheel Pose**

Translation: *Chakra*, from the root *cak* ("to move") means wheel and therefore this is the Wheel Posture.
The *cakra-asana* is also known as the *urdhva-dhanurasana*.
Urdhva means raised, elevated or upright and *dhanur* means bow. Both "wheel posture" and "raised bow posture" describe the appearance of this asana.

Pronunciation: chu-krah-sa-na

Difficulty: (8) (full variation), (3) (bridge variation)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the *shava-asana* (corpse pose).
2. While exhaling bend the knees and bring the feet as close to the buttocks as possible with the soles of the feet flat on the floor.
3. Bend the arms at the elbows and place the palms of the hands flat on the floor directly under each shoulder with the fingers pointing toward the back.
4. While inhaling slowly, begin to raise the head, back and buttocks off the floor while arching the spine. Continue to press downward on the hands and feet while raising the hips and stomach as high as possible.
5. Hold for the duration of the held inhaled breath. When you can't hold the breath comfortable any longer, slowly exhale and return the back to the floor, slide the legs out straight returning to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The *chakra-asana* is more challenging than most other yoga postures. Don't be discouraged if your unable to accomplish it right away. Even attempting this posture without successful completion holds great benefits.

First and foremost is the strength and suppleness it restores to the spine. It strengthens the arms, shoulders and upper back as well and stimulates the cardiovascular system. The *chakra-asana* has an overall tonic effect for the entire body.

As the natural suppleness of the spine is restored after a period of practice you can begin to perfect the form of this *asana* and thus experience greater benefits.

First be certain that the arms are as straight as possible with very little to no bend in the elbows. When you can hold this comfortably, begin breathing through the nostrils while holding the posture and attempt to get a greater arch in the spine by bringing your hands closer to your feet and/or bringing your feet closer to your hands. Finally, you can extend the duration of the *chakra-asana* by doing several repetitions in sequence without resting in-between. As you return from the posture keep the hands behind the shoulders and the soles of the feet flat on the floor and as soon as the back returns to floor immediately raise it and enter the full posture again.

Duration/Repetitions:

The *chakra-asana* is either held for the duration of the inhaled breath or between one and three minutes while breathing gently through the nostrils. Repeat it two or three times.

The "Bridge" Variation:

Although this variation is much easier to perform than the full *chakra-asana*, it shares several of its benefits. In particular it will help to stretch the spine and relieve tightness in the upper back and shoulder area.

To get the full benefit of the bridge variation continual effort should be applied to raising the back upward and creating the greatest possible arch with the spine.

While holding the bridge breath slowly through the nostrils. If there is no discomfort felt in the spine or shoulders then one should advance to the full variation of the *chakra-asana* as described above. Both variations strengthen the back and promote flexibility of the spine. Tightness in the back and spine results from poor posture, stress, a sedentary lifestyle and/or emotional disturbances. You should begin to feel the tightness being released after just a few repetitions.

9. Dhanura-asana



Posture: Dhanura-asana - The Bow Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *dhanur* means bow-shaped, curved or bent. The bow referred is a bow as in "bow and arrow." This *asana* is so named because the body mimics the shape of a bow with its string stretched back ready to shoot an arrow.

Pronunciation: dha-noor-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the shava-asana (corpse pose).
2. Lie on the stomach with the head turned to one side and the arms alongside the body with palms facing upward.
3. Turn the head and place the chin on the floor. Exhale, bend the knees, reach back with the arms and grasp the right ankle with the right hand and the left ankle with the left hand.
4. While inhaling, slowly raise the legs by pulling the ankles up and raising the knees off the floor while simultaneously lifting the chest off the floor. Hold the inhale breath. The weight of the body should be resting on the abdomen.
5. Tilt the head as far back as possible. Hold the posture as long as you can comfortably hold the inhale breath.
6. Slowly exhale bringing the knees to the floor, release the ankles, slowly bring the legs and arms straight down on the floor and turn the head to one side, assuming the prone posture you began with.

Comments:

The most obvious benefit of the *dhanur-asana* is that it restores flexibility to the spine. Regular practice will relieve lower back pain and release tension and strain in the upper back and neck area. The alternating stretching and releasing of the abdominal muscles increases blood flow to this area and aids all sorts of digestive disorders and discomforts. Strain or fatigue in the legs is also released after a few repetitions. Extended practice will help develop upper-body strength.

Duration/Repetitions:

The *dhanur-asana* is either held for the duration of the inhaled or between one and three minutes while breathing gently through the nostrils. Repeat it two or three times.

Variations:

The two variations of the *dhanur-asana* have to do with the method of breathing and the amount of arch of the back. As one progresses with this asana and is able to hold the posture for a longer period of time, the posture can be held while slow, rhythmic breathing is maintained through the nostrils. As the spine becomes more flexible try drawing the feet closer to the head. Some are able to join the top of the head to the soles of the feet although this is certainly not necessary to accomplish the *dhanur-asana*.

10. Ekapada-asana

Posture: *Ekapada-asana* - The One-legged Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *eka* means one and *pada* means foot making this the one-foot, or more commonly, one-legged pose.

Pronunciation: eka-pod-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the *tad-asana*).
2. Focus the eyes straight ahead on a spot midway between waist and eye level and remain focused there throughout this asana. (standing about five feet from a wall would be helpful).
3. Inhale and extend the arms directly in front, parallel with the floor with thumbs touching.
4. Exhale and raise the right knee bending the leg at a 90 degree angle, pause for a moment then extend the leg straight out in front pointing the toes forward.
5. Pause for a moment then swing the leg backward while bending forward at the waist.
6. Breathe slowly through the nostrils and make sure the arms, torso and legs are parallel with the floor.
7. Hold the posture for at least 30 seconds and then return slowly to a standing position.

Comments:

The *ekpada-asana* tones and strengthens leg muscles, improves sense of balance and helps sharpen concentration.

The *ekpada* requires that you become aware of your body/mind as a whole. As you practice this posture turn the attention away from distractions of the mind and center it on full body-awareness. Continual effort in the *ekpada-asana* in this way will help cultivate concentration.

The "closed eyes" variation (see below) intensifies the effect of the posture. Instead of relying on a fixed point of vision as an "anchor" the practitioner will cultivate an inner stability. The *ekpada-asana* also gives strength to the hips and lower back.

Duration/Repetitions:

This posture should be held for a minimum of 30 seconds and can be extended to up to several minutes. Repeat at least twice on each foot.

Variations:

When you can remain in the *ekpada* effortlessly for at least 30 seconds without wavering or losing balance, try doing it with the eyes closed. This variation makes the posture quite challenging but it increases the benefits as described above.

11. Garuda – asana

Posture: Garuda-asana - The Eagle Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *garuda* means eagle. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports the God Vishnu (shown with a bow and arrow in the illustration to the left) and is said to be eager to help humanity fight against demons.

Pronunciation: ga-roo-dah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the shava-asana (corpse pose).
2. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the tad-asana).
3. Draw the left foot upward bending the knee and wrap the left foot around your right leg as you rest the back of your left thigh on the right thigh.
4. Cross your arms at the elbows, left over right.
5. Join the palms of your hands together keeping the fingers pointed upward.
6. Inhale and hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath.
7. Exhale and return to the *tada-asana*. Repeat the posture on the opposite side, wrapping the right leg over the left and the right arm over left.

Comments:

The *Garuda-asana* will strengthen the legs, knees and ankles. It stretches and tones muscles of the leg and can help relieve cramps of the legs.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the hala-asana for as long as you are comfortable. 20-30 seconds is fine for early attempts, increase the time gradually as you become more comfortable. You can also try holding the posture for as long as you can hold the inhaled breath. Repeat 2 or 3 times on each leg.

12. Gomukha - asana



Posture: *Gomukha-asana* - The Cow face Pose

Translation:

The Sanskrit word *garuda* means eagle. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports the God Vishnu (shown with a bow and arrow in the illustration to the

left) and is said to be eager to help humanity fight against demons.

Pronunciation: ga-roo-dah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

"Placing the right ankle on the left side and the left ankle on the right side, makes *Gomukha-asana*, having the appearance of a cow."

Hatha-yoga-pradipika I.22

Instructions:

1. Sit in a crossed-leg position, right leg over left.
2. Spread the legs as far apart as possible without bending the knees.
3. Bend the left knee and place the bottom of the left foot against the inner left thigh. Bring the left heel as close to the perineum as possible. Keep the left knee on the floor.
4. Grasp the right foot with the left hand and keeping the foot on the floor place the heel of the right foot against the front-left portion of the left buttock. The right knee should be directly on top of the left knee..
5. Inhale slowly through the nostrils and raise the right hand over the head and bend the right elbow. Reach behind the back with the left hand and clasp the fingers of both hands (forming an "s" shaped lock).
6. Hold the posture as long as you can comfortably hold the inhale breath. Exhale slowly and then repeat the posture reversing the arms and legs.
- 7.

Comments:

This posture stretches the arms, upper back, chest and the sides of the chest and abdomen. As the shoulder blades are stretched backward the lungs are expanded and as the abdominal muscles are lifted the stomach is toned. It helps to relieve neck strain, backache and tight shoulders. The hands, fingers and wrists are strengthened.

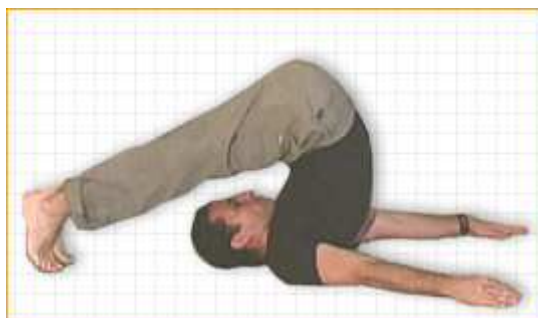
Duration/Repetitions:

You can either hold the posture while the breath is held or you can try holding the posture while breathing gently through the nostrils. If you choose to breathe, then hold the posture for thirty seconds to a minute. Repeat the *gomukha-asana* two to three times on each side.

Variations:

If you are unable to lock the fingers behind the back you may grasp one end of a small piece of cloth in the right hand and the other end of the cloth in the left hand.

13. Hala - asana



Posture: *Hala-asana* - The Plow Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *Hala* means plow, as in a traditional plow that is drawn by a horse or oxen. When performing this posture your body resembles a plow.

Pronunciation: hull-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the [shava-asana](#) (the corpse pose).
2. Inhale through the nostrils. Place the palms face-down on the floor. Keeping the hips on the floor, bend the knees and bring them up toward the stomach while exhaling.
3. Inhale, then while exhaling, raise the legs straight up perpendicular to the floor. You may support your hips with your hands or leave the arms flat on the floor, whichever is most comfortable.
4. Exhale and continue to raise the legs over the head, bending at the waist, lifting the back and buttocks until the toes touch the floor directly in back of the head. Keep the feet together. If the lower back is supported by the hands try returning the arms flat to the floor with the palms facing down. If you are unable to comfortably place the arms on the floor continue to support the lower back with the hands.
5. Keep the knees straight. Breathe slowly through the nostrils and hold the posture for several minutes. If you cannot touch the floor with your toes hold them as close to the floor as possible and continue to exert effort to lower them.
6. Reverse the steps to return to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The benefits of this posture, like the *sarvanga-asana*, are numerous. All of the muscles and ligaments in the calves and thighs are stretched resulting in greater leg flexibility. People suffering from leg cramps will find great relief from the *hala-asana*.

Since the abdominal area is contracted, blood compressed out of this area releases toxins and when the contraction is released the area is flooded with richly oxygenated blood. The contraction also helps to relieve gas and stimulates a sluggish digestive system. Similar effects take place as the neck and chest area is compressed effecting the throat, thyroid, hyperthyroid and lungs. Upper and lower back pain or discomfort is relieved due to the forward stretching of the spine.

It is highly recommended that this posture be accompanied by the [sarvanga-asana](#). In fact, many of the benefits of the *sarvanga-asana* apply to the *hala-asana* as well with the added benefits detailed above.

The *hala-asana* is an excellent morning posture although some might find it more difficult then. During sleep the spine can become somewhat compressed resulting in the experience of tightness or stiffness in the back. A few repetitions of the *hala-asana* will quickly restore flexibility to the spine as well as promote alertness.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *hala-asana* for as long as you are comfortable. 20-30 seconds is fine for early attempts, increase the time gradually as you become more comfortable.

Variations:

There are several variations of the basic *hala-asana* each of which require greater flexibility in the spine

and legs. Once one is adept at performing this *asana* these variations may be tried. The first entails swinging the arms around and either touching or grasping the toes with the hands (1). The posture is then held in this position. (illustrated above)

Another variation calls for dropping the knees to the ground and placing them close the ears and keeping the arms extended on the floor (2). And finally from this variation the arms are swung around and placed over the legs behind the knees and the hands are clasped and pressed down on the knees to hold them firmly on the floor (3). All three variations are held while breathing gently through the nostrils.

Cautions/Restrictions:

The *hala-asana* should not be performed by woman who are menstruating, as is the case with all inverted postures (where the legs are raise over the head). No other restrictions apply.

14. Hasta – pada – angusta - asana

Posture: *Hasta-pada-angusta-asana* The Hand-Foot-Big Toe Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *hasta* means hand, *pada* means foot, and *angusta* means big toe therefore this is the hand-foot-big toe posture.

Pronunciation: ha-sta-pah-don-goo-stah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs.
2. Spread the legs as far apart as possible without bending the knees.
3. Bend the left knee and place the bottom of the left foot against the inner left thigh. Bring the left heel as close to the perineum as possible. Keep the left knee on the floor.
4. Stretch both arms straight out in front of you, then keeping the back straight turn slowly at the waist toward the right aligning the arms with the right leg.
5. Inhale slowly while raising the arms over the head and arching the back.
6. Exhale and slowly while bending forward bringing the chest down to the right thigh. Clasp the big toe of the right foot with the first finger of both hands. Hold this position for the duration of the exhaled breath.
7. Inhale slowly through the nostrils releasing the posture while sitting up straight.
8. Straighten the left leg and return to the seated position described in step 2 then repeat the posture, this time bending the right leg.

Comments:

The benefits of the *hasta-pada-angusta-asana* are similar to those of the *ugra-asana* (i.e.: spinal stretch,

abdominal toning, gastro-intestinal stimulation). There is additional stretching of the leg that is outstretched as well as to the groin.

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat two or three times on each leg.

15. Matsya - sana



Posture: *Matsya-asana* - The Fish Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *matsya* means fish, therefore this is the fish posture. Matsya (depicted to the left) is a divine being, found in Hindu mythology, that saved mankind from a universal flood.

Pronunciation: maht-see-yah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the *shava-asana*.
2. Keeping the buttocks on the floor, inhale and raise the head, shoulders, back and upper arms off the floor arching the back and raising the chest up. Tilt the head back and place the top of the head flat on the floor.
3. Raise the elbows off the floor bring your hands up just below the chest and join them at the palms with the fingers pointing straight up (form the anjali-mudra or salutation hand gesture). Hold for the duration of the inhale breath or breath gently through the nostrils to remain in the posture longer.
4. Return to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The *matsya-asana* creates a great expansion and stretching of the chest which helps relieve upper respiratory congestion as well as benefits the heart. Additionally, the sinus are drained and opened from the inversion of the head, stretching of the neck and pressure placed on the top of the head. The thyroid and parathyroid glands are stimulated as well.

Duration/Repetitions:

Since this is not a difficult posture, it is recommended that you breath while holding it for between two and four minutes. If you are uncomfortable breathing, hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath. Repeat two or three times.



Variations:

There is one major variation in the *matsya-asana* and it is a bit more challenging than the one described

above (illustrated above). It calls for beginning the posture in *padma-asana* or the full lotus seated posture and then lying flat on the back while the legs are still locked. From there on the posture is done the same way as described above.

16. Naga - asana



Posture: **Naga-asana - The Cobra Pose**

Translation: The Sanskrit word *naga* means snake or serpent. The *naga-asana* is also known as the *bhujanga-asana*. The Sanskrit word *bhujanga*, which also means snake, is derived from the root *bhuj* which means to bend or curve.

Pronunciation: na-gah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

"Let the body, from navel to toes, touch the ground, the palms placed upon the ground, and raise gently the upper part of the body (from navel to head) like a snake. This posture increases the gastric fire; it destroys all diseases and by constant practice leads to the awakening of *Kundalini*."

The Gheranda-samhita II.42-43.

Instructions:

1. Lie on the stomach with the head turned to one side and the arms alongside the body with palms facing upward.
2. Turn the head and place the chin on the floor. Inhale then exhale slowly through the nostrils and swing the arms around until the hands are placed just below the chin with the palms down and the finger tips of each hand almost touching and the elbows on the floor.
3. Inhale slowly through the nostrils, press down on the hands and lift the torso from the waist up off the floor, arching the spine backwards and straightening the arms. Keep the hips on the floor.
4. Tilt the head as far back as possible and hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath.
5. Exhale and reverse the process to return to position #1.

Comments:

If you find it uncomfortable holding the breath while the posture is held, breath gently through the nostrils. Some may find that they are able to arch the spine back even more than in the initial arch in step 3. In this case try "walking" the hands toward the pelvic region and stretching the head further back.

In addition to the obvious benefits to the spine and lower back, the standard variation of the *naga-asana* strengthens the wrists and stretches the muscles in the chest. By maintaining a constant exertion to create a greater arch in the spine, the stomach and pelvic muscles are strengthened. Greater strength in these areas can be cultivated by performing the variation where the arms remain on the ground. B.K.S.

Iyengar, a renowned expert in *yoga-asanas*, claims that displaced spinal discs can be placed back in their original position by practicing the *naga-asana*.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture for either the duration of a held inhaled breath or from one-half to three minutes. Repeat the *naga-asana* two to five times.

17. Nataraja - asana



Posture: Nataraja-asana

The King of the Dance Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *nata* means dancer and *raja* means king. Nataraja is another name for Shiva, the Lord of the Dance, whose cosmic dance is the creation and destruction of the world.

Pronunciation: nah-tah-raj-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the tad-asana).
2. Inhale and bend the right leg backward grasping the left foot with your left hand while simultaneously extending the right arm straight out in front.
3. Continue raising the right arm upward until it is about 45 degrees from the floor while lifting the left leg as high as possible with the left arm.
4. Hold the posture while breathing gently through the nostrils. Keep your gaze fixed slightly above the horizon.
5. Remain in the *nataraja-asana* for about one minute then return slowly to a standing position. Repeat by reversing directions 2-4.

Comments:

Perform the *nataraja-asana* gracefully as if dancing, yet firmly with focused attention.

This posture helps to strengthen your sense of balance and concentration. The arch formed by the back and stretched leg gently aligns the vertebrae of the spine restoring suppleness and easing strain caused