



B.K.S. IYENGAR

YOGA

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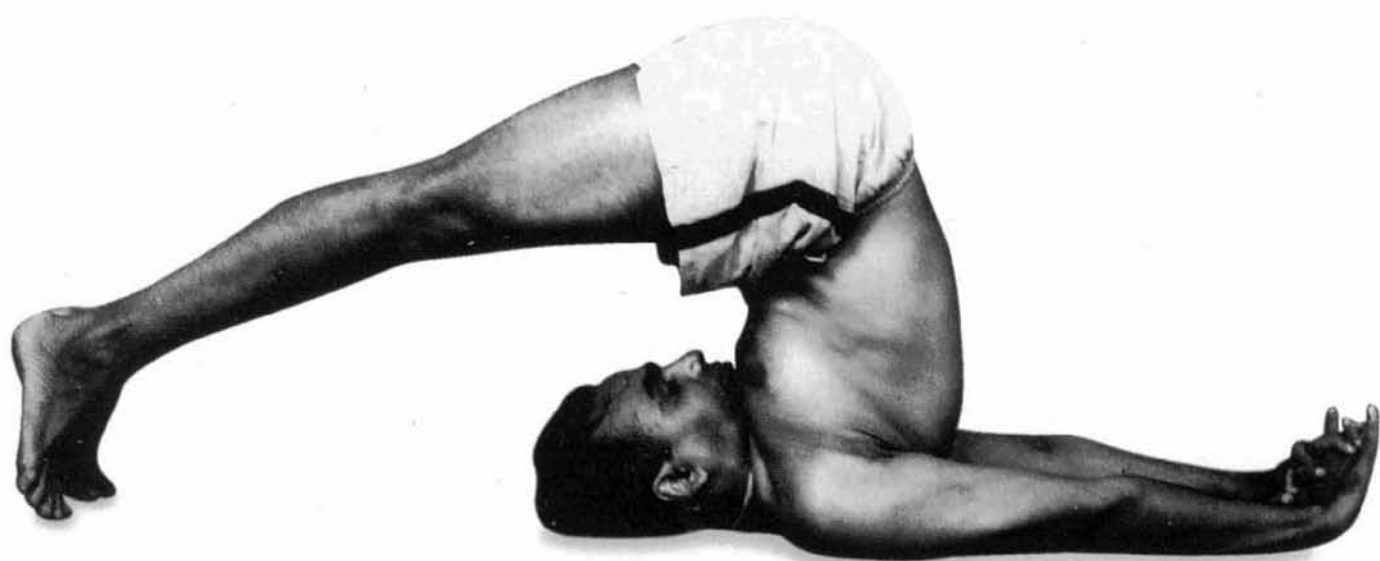
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B.K.S. IYENGAR

YOGA



THE PATH TO HOLISTIC HEALTH



A DORLING KINDERSLEY BOOK

Contents



FOREWORD 6

Chapter 1 - Yoga for You 8

- Aims of Yoga 10
- Meaning of Yoga 14
- The Way to Health 16
- Benefits of Poses 17
- Yoga & Fitness 18
- Yoga & Stress 20



Chapter 2 - Philosophy of Yoga 22

- Philosophy of Asanas 24
- States of Mind 26
- Eight Limbs 29
- Pranayama 32
- Chakras 35
- The Guru & the Yogi 38



Chapter 3 - Asanas for You 40

Classic Poses 42

- Standing Asanas** 46 Tadasana 48 ♦ Utthita Trikonasana 50 ♦ Virabhadrasana 2 56 ♦ Utthita Parsvakonasana 60
Parsvottanasana 64 ♦ Adhomukha Svanasana 68 ♦ Uttanasana 72 ♦ Virabhadrasana 1 76
- Sitting Asanas** 80 Dandasana 82 ♦ Virasana 84 ♦ Baddhakonasana 88 ♦ **Forward Bends** 92 Janu Sirsasana 94
Trianga Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana 98 ♦ Paschimottanasana 102 ♦ **Twists** 106 Bharadvajasana 108
Marichyasana 112 ♦ **Inversions** 116 Salamba Sirsasana 118 ♦ Salamba Sarvangasana 124 ♦ Halasana 130
- Back Bends** 134 Ustrasana 136 ♦ Urdhva Dhanurasana 140 ♦ **Reclining Asanas** 144 Supta Virasana 146 ♦ Savasana 150

Chapter 4 - Yoga for Stress 154

Understanding Stress 156

The Modern World 158

Food & Nourishment 159

Positive & Negative Stress 160

Asanas & Stress 162

Asanas with Props 164

Props 166

Asanas for Stress Tadasana Samasthithi 168 ♦ Tadasana Urdhva Hastasana 169 ♦ Tadasana Urdhva Baddha Hastasana 170 ♦ Tadasana Paschima Baddha Namaskar 171 ♦ Tadasana Paschima Namaskar 172 Tadasana Gomukhasana 173 ♦ Utthita Trikonasana 174 ♦ Utthita Parsvakonasana 176

Ardha Chandrasana 178 ♦ Uttanasana 179 ♦ Prasrita Padottanasana 182 ♦ Adhomukha Svanasana 184

Dandasana 187 ♦ Virasana 188 ♦ Urdhvamukha Janu Sirsasana 189 ♦ Baddhakonasana 190

Swastikasana 191 ♦ Paripurna Navasana 192 ♦ Upavista Konasana 195 ♦ Paschimottanasana 196

Adhomukha Paschimottanasana 199 ♦ Janu Sirsasana 200 ♦ Adhomukha Virasana 202

Adhomukha Swastikasana 204 ♦ Bharadvajasana 205 ♦ Marichyasana 207 ♦ Utthita Marichyasana 208

Parsva Virasana 210 ♦ Salamba Sarvangasana 212 ♦ Halasana 214 ♦ Viparita Karani 216 ♦ Setubandha Sarvangasana 218

Viparita Dandasana 220 ♦ Ustrasana 222 ♦ Supta Padangusthasana 224 ♦ Supta Baddhakonasana 226

Supta Virasana 228 ♦ Ujjayi Pranayama 230 ♦ Viloma 2 Pranayama 232 ♦ Savasana 234



Chapter 5 - Yoga for Ailments 236

Yoga Therapy 238

Heart & Circulation 242 ♦ Respiratory System 254 ♦ Digestive System 263 ♦ Urinary System 278

Hormonal System 280 ♦ Immune System 286 ♦ Muscles, Bones, & Joints 290 ♦ Skin 322

Brain & Nervous System 329 ♦ Mind & Emotions 337 ♦ Women's Health 356 ♦ Men's Health 375



Chapter 6 - Iyengar Yoga Course 384

Guide to your Yoga Practice 386

20-Week Yoga Course 388



ANATOMY GUIDE 404

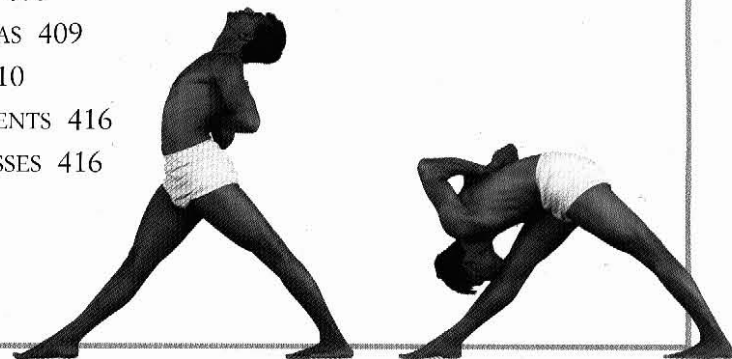
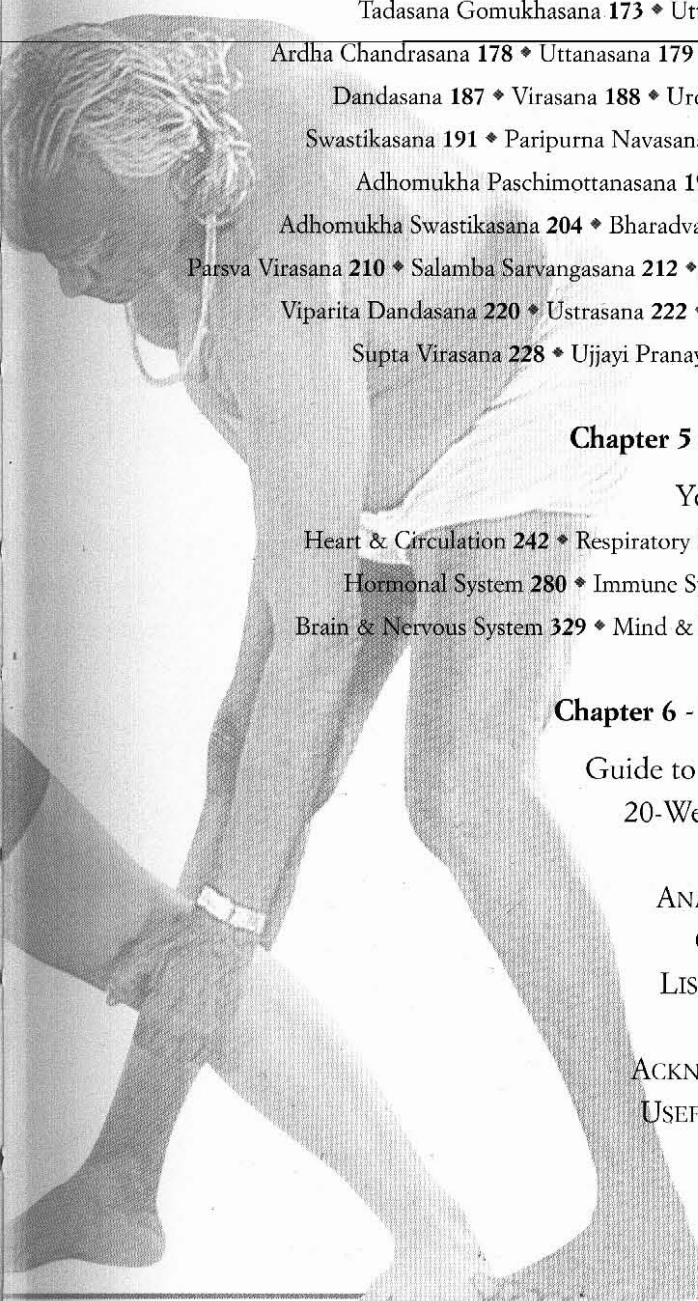
GLOSSARY 408

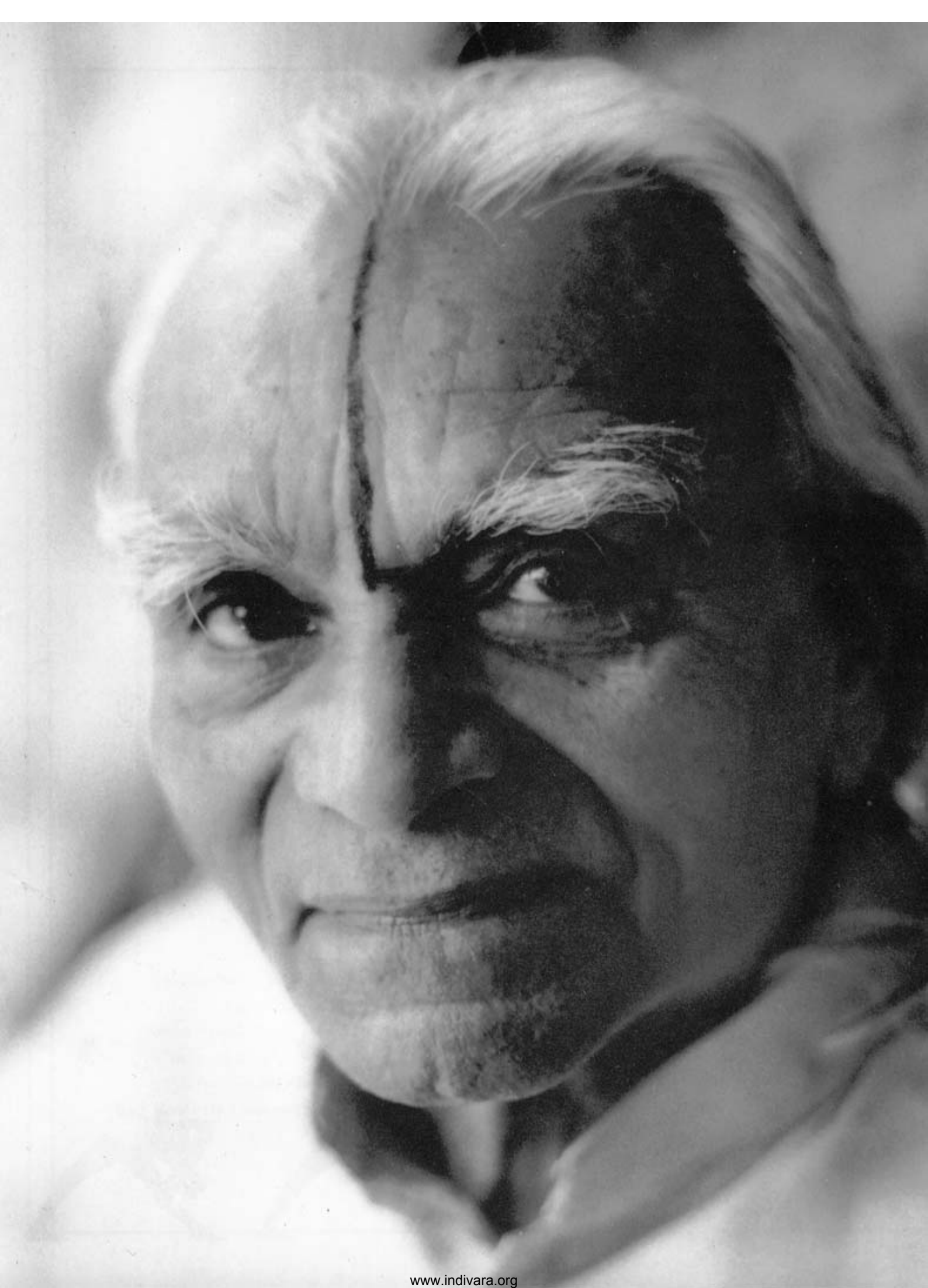
LIST OF ASANAS 409

INDEX 410

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 416

USEFUL ADDRESSES 416





FOREWORD

by Yogacharya B.K.S. Iyengar

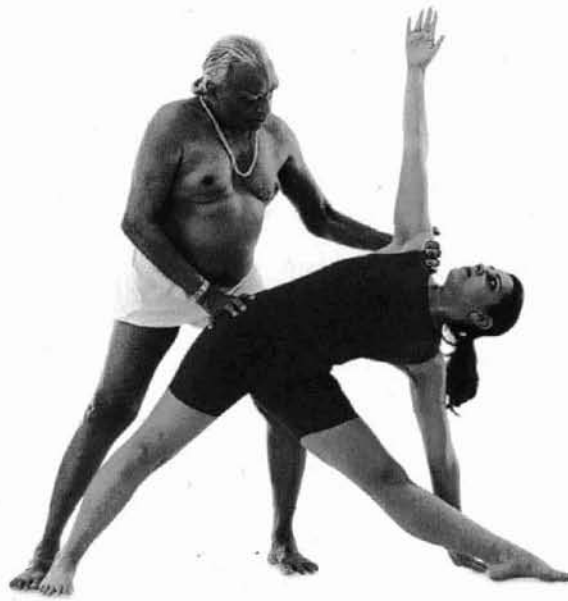
Yoga is for everyone. You need not be an expert or at the peak of physical fitness to practise the asanas described in this book. The strain of modern life can lead to physical pain and illness, as we neglect our bodies in the race for material success. The stress of modern life can also lead to mental suffering: feelings of inadequacy, isolation, or powerlessness. Yoga helps to integrate the mental and the physical plane, bringing about a sense of inner and outer balance, or what I term *alignment*. True alignment means that the inner mind reaches every cell and fibre of the body.

~~During sixty years of teaching and practising, I have observed that~~ some students pay attention only to the physical aspect of yoga. Their practice is like a fast-flowing stream, tumbling and falling, which lacks depth and direction. By attending to the mental and spiritual side, a sincere student of yoga becomes like a smoothly flowing river which helps to irrigate and fertilize the land around it. Just as one cannot dip into the same river twice, so each and every asana refreshes your life force with new energy.

My effort in this book has been to focus on techniques, so that even the beginner will have a thorough understanding of how to practise asanas in order to obtain the maximum benefit. By using a few simple props, students with different capabilities can gradually build up strength, confidence, and flexibility without the threat of strain or injury. The yoga techniques described and illustrated in this book can also help those with specific ailments. Regular practice builds up the body's inner strength and natural resistance, helps to alleviate pain, and tackles the root, rather than the symptoms, of the problem. Across the world, there is now a growing awareness that alternative therapies are more conducive to health than conventional ones. It is my hope that this book will help all those who want to change their lives through yoga. May yoga's blessing be on all of you.



CHAPTER 1



*“Yoga is a light which, once
lit, will never dim.
The better your practice, the
brighter the flame.”*

Yoga for You

The primary aim of yoga is to restore the mind to simplicity and peace, to free it from confusion and distress. This sense of calm comes from the practice of yogic asanas and pranayama. Unlike other forms of exercise which strain muscles and bones, yoga gently rejuvenates the body. By restoring the body, yoga frees the mind from the negative feelings caused by the fast pace of modern life. The practice of yoga fills up the reservoirs of hope and optimism within you. It helps you to overcome all obstacles on the path to perfect health and spiritual contentment. It is a rebirth.

Aims of Yoga

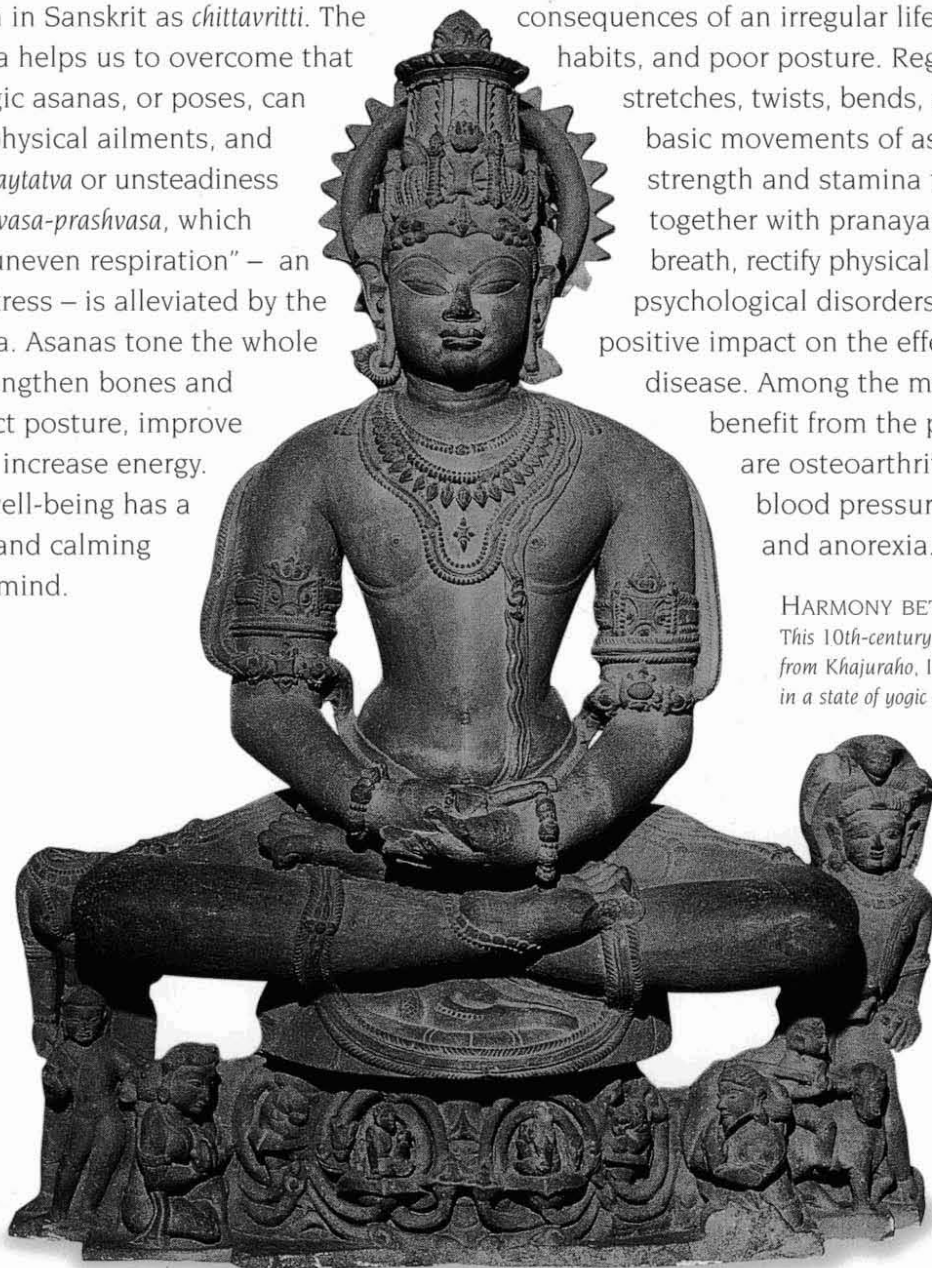
The practice of yoga aims at overcoming the limitations of the body. Yoga teaches us that the goal of every individual's life is to take the inner journey to the soul. Yoga offers both the goal and the means to reach it.

When there is perfect harmony between body and mind, we achieve self-realization. Yoga teaches us that obstacles in the path of our self-realization indicate themselves in physical or mental indisposition. When our physical state is not perfect, this causes an imbalance in our mental state, which is known in Sanskrit as *chittavritti*. The practice of yoga helps us to overcome that imbalance. Yogic asanas, or poses, can cure *vyadhi* or physical ailments, and redress *angamejaytatva* or unsteadiness in the body. *Shvasa-prashvasa*, which translates as “uneven respiration” – an indication of stress – is alleviated by the practice of yoga. Asanas tone the whole body. They strengthen bones and muscles, correct posture, improve breathing, and increase energy. This physical well-being has a strengthening and calming impact on the mind.

ASANAS AND PRANAYAMA

Practising asanas cleanses the body. Just as a goldsmith heats gold in fire to burn out its impurities, similarly, asanas, by increasing the circulation of fresh blood through the body, purge it of the diseases and toxins which are the consequences of an irregular lifestyle, unhealthy habits, and poor posture. Regular practice of the stretches, twists, bends, and inversions – the basic movements of asanas – restores strength and stamina to the body. Asanas, together with pranayama, or the control of breath, rectify physical, physiological, and psychological disorders. They have a positive impact on the effects of stress and disease. Among the many ailments that benefit from the practice of asanas are osteoarthritis, high and low blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, and anorexia.

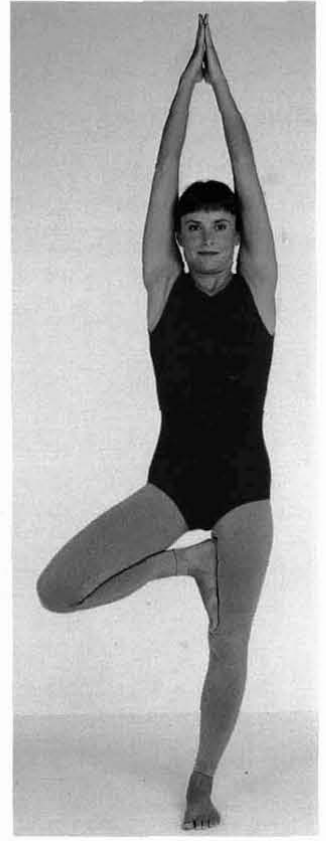
HARMONY BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL
This 10th-century figure, the Yoga Narayan, from Khajuraho, India, depicts the god Vishnu in a state of yogic calm



MIND AND BODY

The body and the mind are in a state of constant interaction. Yogic science does not demarcate where the body ends and the mind begins, but approaches both as a single, integrated entity. The turmoil of daily life brings stress to the body and the mind. This creates anxiety, depression, restlessness, and rage. Yoga asanas, while appearing to deal with the physical body alone, actually influence the chemical balance of the brain, which in turn improves one's mental state of being.

The obstacles to this perfect balance were outlined by the sage, Patanjali, some 2,000 years ago in the *Yoga Sutras*. Historians disagree on the exact dates, but it is known that the *sutras*, or aphorisms on the philosophy and practice of yoga, were compiled sometime between 300 BC and AD 300, and the entire corpus was called the *Patanjali Yoga Darshana*. In the final chapter of the *Yoga Sutras*, the *Samadhi Pada*, Patanjali discusses the disorders that are the root cause of suffering. According to the sage, *vyadhi* or physical ailments, create emotional upheaval. The task of yoga is to tackle both.

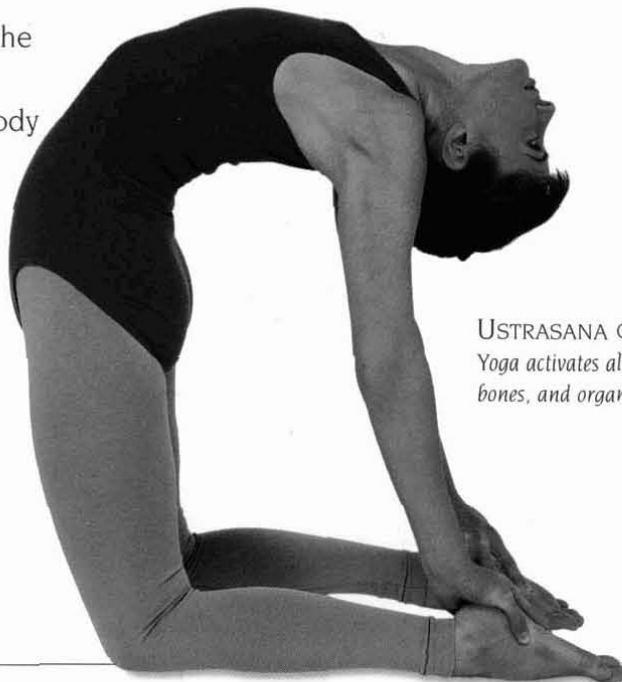
**TIMELESS TRADITION**

The 4th-century figure from Mahabalipuram, India (left), and this modern woman show that certain classic movements are eternal

“After a session of yoga, the mind becomes tranquil and passive.”

The alleviation of pain is, even today, one of the main reasons for the journey into yoga for most people. Yoga asanas work specific parts of the body to soothe and relax the mind as well. Inverted asanas, for instance, simultaneously calm and stimulate the brain. These asanas activate glands and vital organs by supplying fresh blood to the brain, making it alert but relaxed.

Yoga possesses the unique ability to calm the nerves. The nerves function as the medium between the physiological body and the psychological body (see page 42). Practising yoga has the holistic impact of relaxing the body and calming the mind.



USTRASANA OR CAMEL POSE
Yoga activates all the muscles, bones, and organs of the body

STAGES OF YOGA

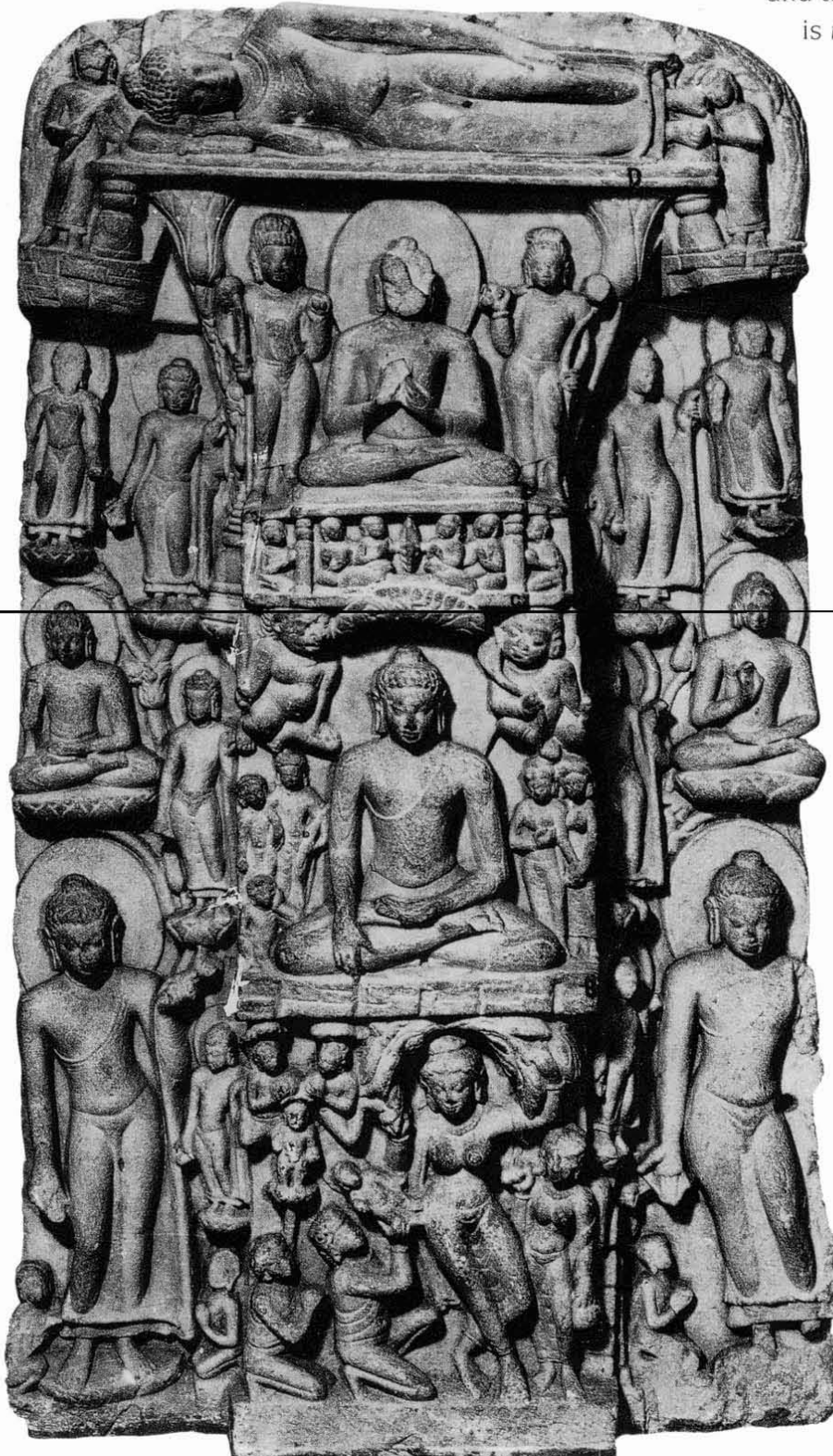
The primary aim of yoga is to restore the mind to simplicity, peace, and poise, to free it from confusion and distress. This simplicity, this sense of order and calm, comes from the practice of asanas and pranayama. Yoga asanas integrate the

body, the mind, the intelligence and, finally, the self, in four stages. The first stage, *arambhavastha*, is one in which we practise at the level of the physical body. The second stage is *ghatavastha*, when the mind learns to move in unison with the body. The third level, *parichayavastha*, occurs when the intelligence and the body become one. The final stage is *nispattyavastha*, the state of perfection (see page 42).

Spiritual awareness flows into the student of yoga through these stages. *Dukha*, which is misery or pain, vanishes, and the art of living in simplicity and peace is realized.

YOGA FILLS THE SPIRITUAL VOID

The world today is overwhelmingly materialistic, and this has created a great spiritual void in our lives. Our lifestyles are unduly complex and we become stressed primarily as a result of our own actions. Our existence feels barren and devoid of meaning. There is a lack of spiritual dimension to our lives and in our relationships. This has led many reflective people to realize that solace and inspiration, peace and happiness, cannot come from the external environment but must come from within.



THE FOUR STAGES OF THE BUDDHA'S JOURNEY TO SELF-REALIZATION

This 5th-century frieze from Sarnath, India, shows the four defining events of the Buddha's life. (From the bottom) Buddha's birth from his mother's hip; attaining enlightenment in Bodhgaya; preaching to his disciples; the ascent to the celestial realms



YOGA LIBERATES YOU

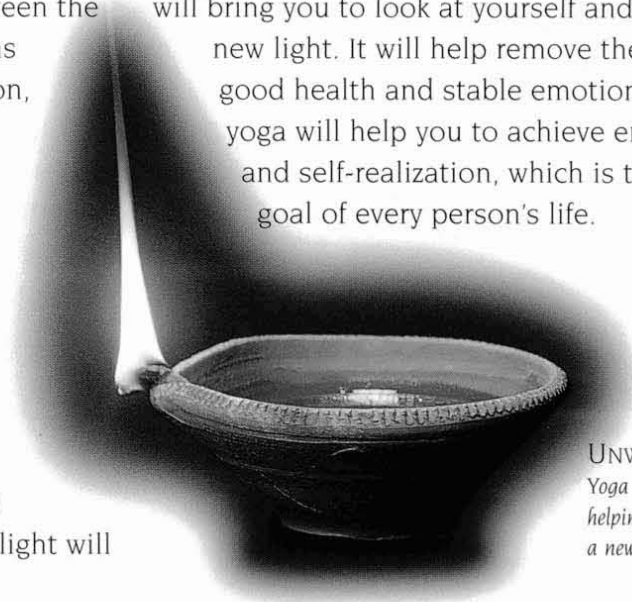
When you practise yoga, your mind becomes unfettered and free

THE FREEDOM OF YOGA

The impact of yoga is never purely physical. Asanas, if correctly practised, bridge the divide between the physical and the mental spheres. Yoga stems the feelings of pain, fatigue, doubt, confusion, indifference, laziness, self-delusion, and despair that assail us from time to time. The yogic mind simply refuses to accept such negative emotions and seeks to overcome these turbulent currents on the voyage to the total liberation of the self. Once we become sincere practitioners of yoga, we cease to be tormented by these unhappy and discouraging states of mind.

Yoga illuminates your life. If you practise sincerely, with seriousness and honesty, its light will

spread to all aspects of your life. Regular practice will bring you to look at yourself and your goals in a new light. It will help remove the obstacles to good health and stable emotions. In this way, yoga will help you to achieve emancipation and self-realization, which is the ultimate goal of every person's life.



UNWAVERING FLAME
*Yoga illuminates your life,
helping you to see yourself in
a new light*

Meaning of Yoga

Yoga is an ancient art based on an extremely subtle science, that of the body, mind, and soul. The prolonged practice of yoga will, in time, lead the student to a sense of peace and a feeling of being at one with his or her environment.

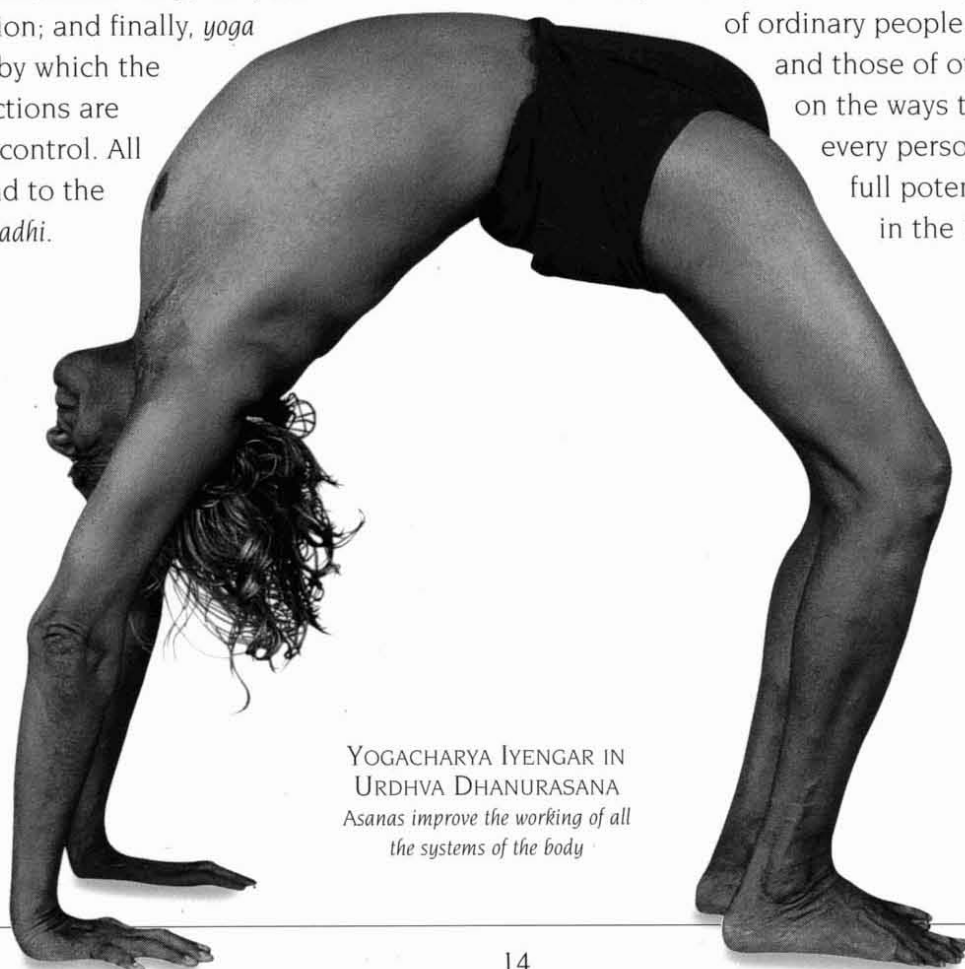
Most people know that the practice of yoga makes the body strong and flexible. It is also well known that yoga improves the functioning of the respiratory, circulatory, digestive, and hormonal systems. Yoga also brings emotional stability and clarity of mind, but that is only the beginning of the journey to *samadhi*, or self-realization, which is the ultimate aim of yoga.

The ancient sages, who meditated on the human condition 2,000 years ago, outlined four ways to self-realization: *jnana marg*, or the path to knowledge, when the seeker learns to

discriminate between the real and the unreal; *karma marg*, the path of selfless service without thought of reward; *bhakti marg*, the path of love and devotion; and finally, *yoga marg*, the path by which the mind and its actions are brought under control. All these paths lead to the same goal: *samadhi*.

The word "yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* which means "to join" or "to yoke"; the related meaning is "to focus attention on" or "to use". In philosophical terms, the union of the individual self, *jivatma*, with the universal self, *paramatma*, is yoga. The union results in a pure and perfect state of consciousness in which the feeling of "I" simply does not exist. Prior to this union is the union of the body with the mind, and the mind with the self. Yoga is thus a dynamic, internal experience which integrates the body, the senses, the mind, and the intelligence, with the self.

The sage Patanjali was a master of yoga and a fully evolved soul. But this great thinker had the ability to empathize with the joys and sorrows of ordinary people. His reflections and those of other ancient sages on the ways through which every person could realize his full potential were outlined in the 196 *Yoga Sutras*.



YOGACHARYA IYENGAR IN
URDHVA DHANURASANA
*Asanas improve the working of all
the systems of the body*

WHERE YOGA CAN TAKE YOU

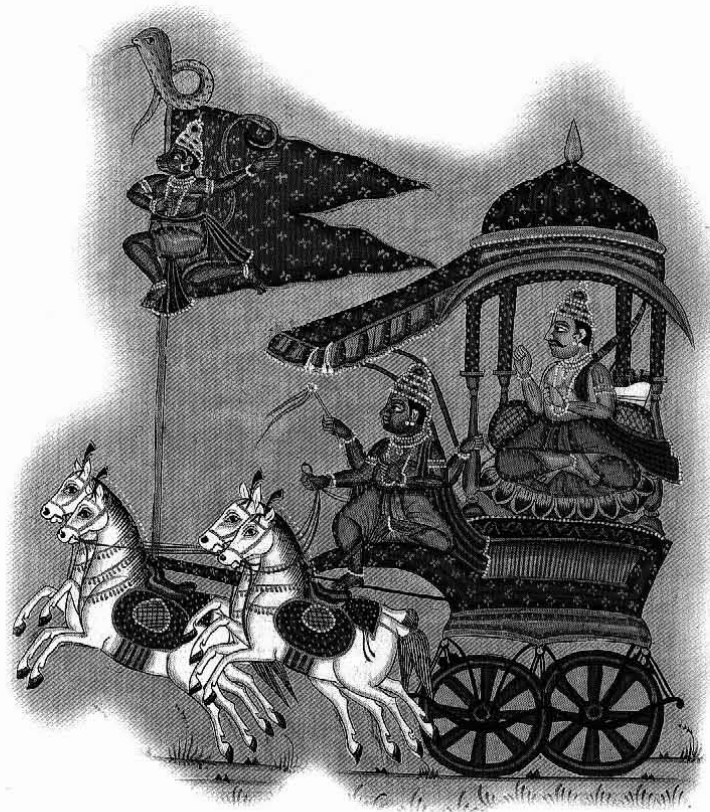
According to Patanjali, the aim of yoga is to calm the chaos of conflicting impulses and thoughts. The mind, which is responsible for our thoughts and impulses, is naturally inclined to *asmitha* or egoism. From this spring the prejudice and biases which lead to pain and distress in our daily lives. Yogic science centres the intelligence in two areas: the heart and the head. The intelligence of the heart, sometimes also called the "root mind", is the actual agent of *ahankara* or false pride, which disturbs the intelligence of the head, causing fluctuations in the body and mind.

Patanjali describes these afflictions as: *vyadhi* or physical ailments, *styana* or the reluctance to work, *samshaya* or doubt, *pramadha* or indifference, *alasya* or laziness, *avirati* or the desire for sensual satisfaction, *bharanti darshana* or false knowledge, *alabdha bhūmikatva* or indisposition, *angamejayatva* or unsteadiness in the body, and, lastly, *śvāsa-prashvāsa* or unsteady respiration. Only yoga eradicates these afflictions, and disciplines the mind, emotions, intellect, and reason.

ASTANGA YOGA

Yoga is also known as Astanga yoga. *Astanga* means "8 limbs" or "steps" (see page 29) and is divided into 3 disciplines. The discipline, *bahiranga-sadhana*, comprises ethical practices in the form of *yama*, or general ethical principles, *niyama*, or self-restraint, and physical practices in the form of *asanas* as well as *pranayama*.

The second discipline, *antaranga-sadhana*, is emotional or mental discipline brought to maturity by *pranayama* and *pratyahara*, or mental detachment. Lastly, *antaratma-sadhana* is the successful quest of the soul through *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi* (see page 29).



KRISHNA DRIVING THE CHARIOT OF THE WARRIOR, ARJUN
Their discourses are narrated in the Bhagavad Gita, the main source of yogic philosophy

In this spiritual quest, it is important to remember the role of the body. The *Kathopanishad*, an ancient text compiled between 300-400 BC, compares the body to a chariot, the senses to the horses, and the mind to the reins. The intellect is the charioteer and the soul is the master of the chariot. If anything were to go wrong with the chariot, the horses, the reins, or the charioteer, the chariot and the charioteer would come to grief, and so would the master of the chariot.

But, writes Patanjali in *Yoga Sutra* 11.28, "The practice of yoga destroys the impurities of the body and mind, after which maturity in intelligence and wisdom radiate from the core of the being to function in unison with the body, senses, mind, intelligence, and the consciousness."

"The aim of yoga is to calm the chaos of conflicting impulses."

The Way to Health

Good health results from perfect communication between each part of the body and mind; when each cell communes with every other. Although yoga is essentially a spiritual science, it leads to a sense of physical and emotional well-being.

Health is not just freedom from disease. For good health, the joints, tissues, muscles, cells, nerves, glands, and each system of the body must all be in a state of perfect balance and harmony. Health is the perfect equilibrium of the body and mind, intellect, and soul.

Health is like the flowing water of a river, always fresh and pure, in a constant state of flux. Humans are a combination of the senses of perception, the organs of action, the mind, the intelligence, the inner consciousness, and the conscience. Each of these is worked on by the practice of yoga.

Yoga asanas help to ensure an even distribution of bio-energy, or life-force, which brings the mind to a state of calm. A practitioner of yoga faces life not as a victim, but as a master, in control of his or her life situations, circumstances, and environment.

Asanas balance the respiratory, circulatory, nervous, hormonal, digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems perfectly.

The equilibrium in the body then brings mental peace and enhances intellectual clarity.

GOOD HEALTH

A healthy body is like the flowing water of a river - always fresh and pure



YOGA IS FOR EVERYONE

There are asanas to suit every constitution, irrespective of age or physical condition

HARMONY OF BODY AND MIND

Asanas cater to the needs of each individual according to his or her specific constitution and physical condition. They involve vertical, horizontal, and cyclical movements, which provide energy to the system by directing the blood supply to the areas of the body which need it most. In yoga, each cell is observed, attended to, and provided with a fresh supply of blood, allowing it to function smoothly.

The mind is naturally active and dynamic, while the soul is luminous. However, unhealthy bodies tend to house inert, dull, and sluggish minds. It is the practice of yoga which removes this sluggishness from the body and brings it to the level of the active mind. Ultimately, both the body and mind rise to the level of the illuminated self.

The practice of yoga stimulates and changes emotional attitudes, converting apprehensiveness into courage, indecision and poor judgement into positive decision-making skills, and emotional instability into confidence and mental equilibrium.



Benefits of Poses

Asanas are based on the three basic human postures of standing, sitting, or lying down. But they are not a series of movements to be followed mechanically. They have a logic which must be internalized if the pose is to be practised correctly.

The Sanskrit term, *asana*, is sometimes translated as "pose" and sometimes as "posture". Neither translation is wholly accurate, as they do not convey the element of thought or consciousness that must inform each movement of the asana. The final pose of an asana is achieved when all the parts of the body are positioned correctly, with full awareness and intelligence.

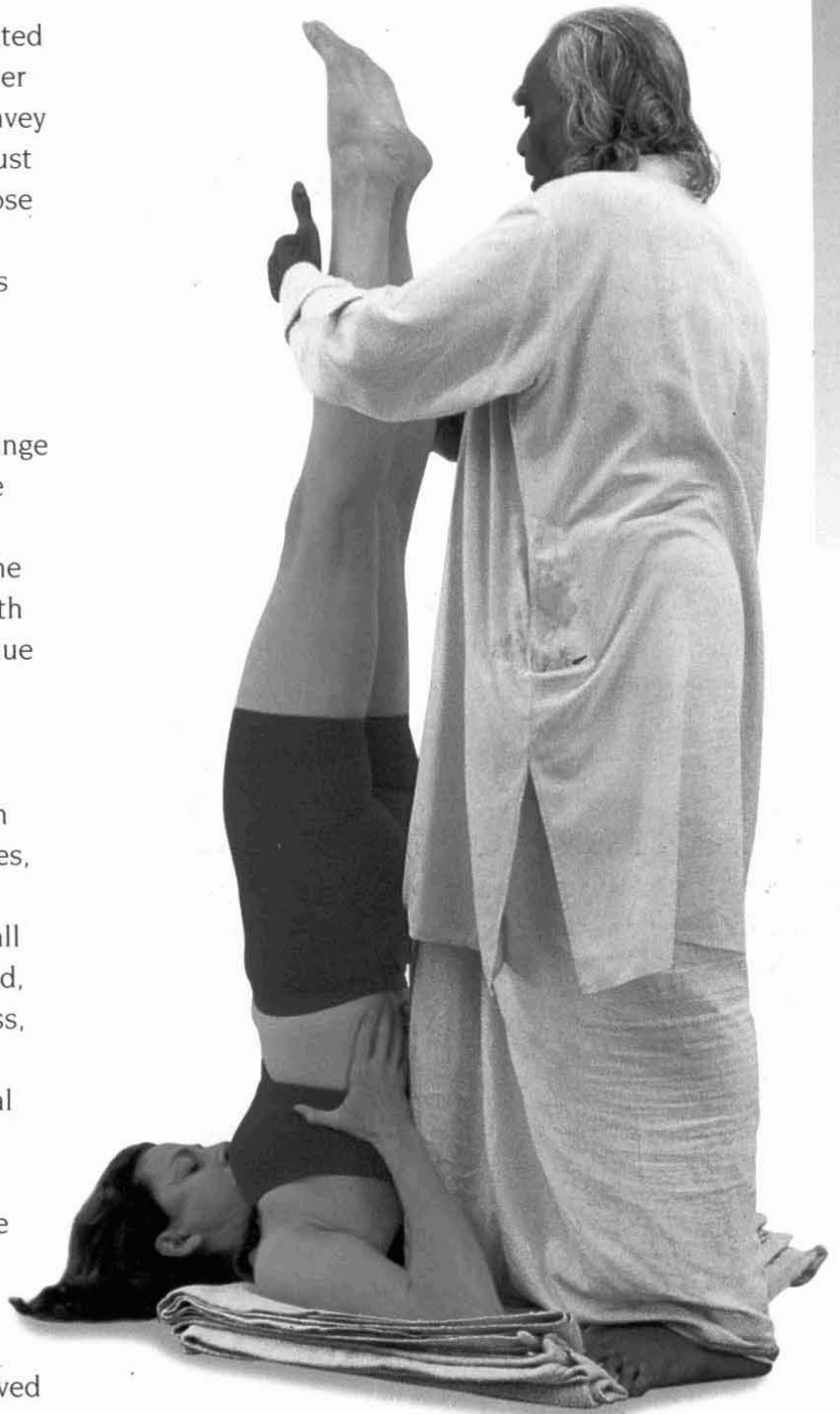
To achieve this, you must think through the structure of the asana. Realize the fundamental points by imagining how you will adjust and arrange each part of your anatomical body, especially the limbs, in the given movements.

Then, mould the body to fit the structure of the asana, making sure that the balance between both sides of the body is perfect, until there is no undue stress on any one organ, muscle, bone, or joint.

IMPORTANCE OF PRACTISING ASANAS

The practice of asanas has a beneficial impact on the whole body. Asanas not only tone the muscles, tissues, ligaments, joints, and nerves, but also maintain the smooth functioning and health of all the body's systems. They relax the body and mind, allowing both to recover from fatigue or weakness, and the stress of daily life. Asanas also boost metabolism, lymphatic circulation, and hormonal secretions, and bring about a chemical balance in the body.

It is important to keep practising until you are absolutely comfortable in the final pose. It is only then that you experience the full benefits of the asana. The sage Patanjali observes in *Yoga Sutra* 11.47, "Perfection in an asana is achieved when the effort to perform it becomes effortless, and the infinite being within is reached."



PERFECT BALANCE

Yogacharya Iyengar supports a student in Salamba Sarvangasana

Yoga & Fitness

Most types of exercise are competitive. Yoga, although non-competitive, is nevertheless challenging. The challenge is to one's own will power. It is a competition between one's self and one's body.

Exercise usually involves quick and forceful body movements. It has repeated actions which often lead to exertion, tension, and fatigue. Yoga asanas, on the other hand, involve movements which bring stability to the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the consciousness, and finally, to the conscience. The very essence of an asana is steady movement, a process that does not simply end, but finds fulfilment in tranquillity.

Most diseases are caused by the fluctuations in the brain and in the behavioural pattern of the body. In yogic practice, the brain is quietened, the senses are stilled, and perceptions are altered, all generating a calm feeling of detachment. With practice, the student of yoga learns to treat the brain as an object and the body as a subject. Energy is diffused from the brain to the other parts of the body. The brain and body then work together and

energy is evenly balanced between the two. Yoga is thus termed *sarvaanga sadhana* or "holistic practice". No other form of exercise so completely involves the mind and self with the body, resulting in all-round development and harmony. Other forms of exercise address only particular parts of the body. Such forms are termed *angabhaga sadhana* or "physical exercise".

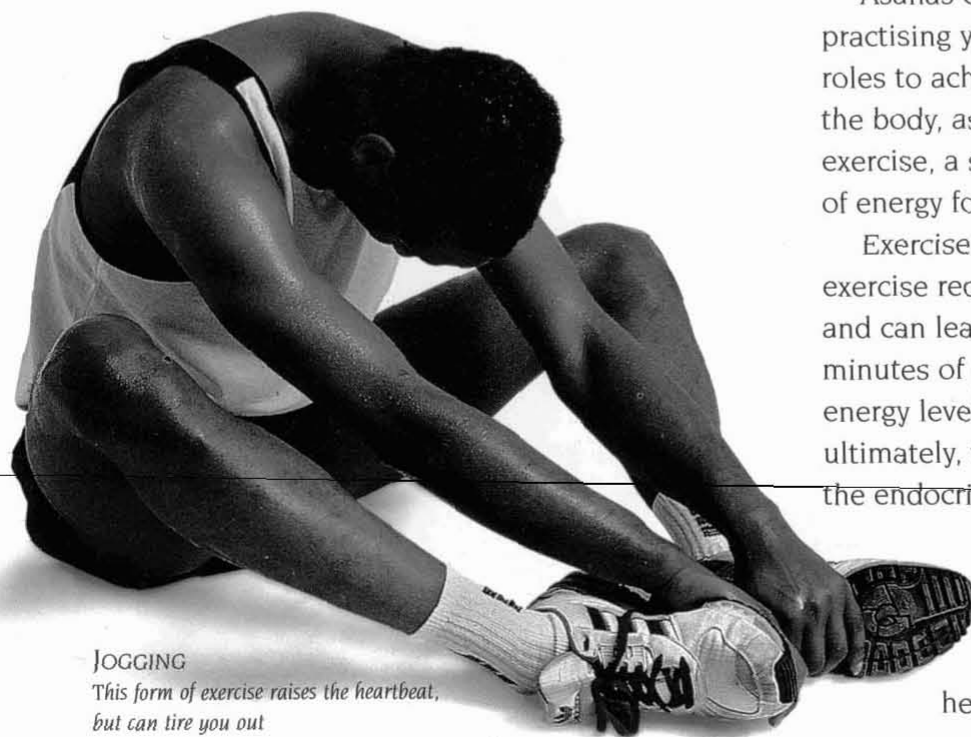
STIMULATIVE EXERCISE

Yoga asanas are stimulative exercises, while other endurance exercises are irritative. For instance, medical experts claim that jogging stimulates the heart. In fact, though the heartbeat of the jogger increases, the heart is not stimulated in the yogic sense of being energized and invigorated. In yoga, back bends, for example, are more physically demanding than jogging, but the heart beats at a steady, rhythmic pace.

Asanas do not lead to breathlessness. When practising yoga, strength and power play separate roles to achieve a perfect balance in every part of the body, as well as the mind. After such stimulating exercise, a sense of rejuvenation and a fresh surge of energy follow.

Exercise can also be exhausting. Many forms of exercise require physical strength and endurance and can lead to a feeling of fatigue after 10-15 minutes of practice. Many such exercises improve energy levels by boosting nerve function, but ultimately, this exhausts the cellular reserves and the endocrine glands. Cellular toxins increase, and

though circulation is enhanced, it is at the cost of irritating the other body systems and increasing the pulse rate and blood pressure. Ultimately, the heart is taxed and overworked.



JOGGING

This form of exercise raises the heartbeat, but can tire you out

An athlete's strong lung capacity is achieved by hard and forceful usage, which is not conducive to preserving the health of the lungs. Furthermore, ordinary physical exercise, such as in jogging, tennis, or football, lends itself to repetitive injuries of the bones, joints, and ligaments.

Such forms of exercise work with – and for – the skeletal and muscular systems. They cannot penetrate beyond these limits. But asanas penetrate each layer of the body and, ultimately, the consciousness itself. Only in yoga can you keep both the body and the mind relaxed, even as you stretch, extend, rotate, and flex your body.

Yoga, unlike other forms of exercise, keeps the nervous system elastic and capable of bearing stress. Although all forms of exercise bring about a feeling of well-being, they also stress the body. Yoga refreshes the body, while other systems exhaust it. Yoga involves the equal exertion of all parts of the body and does not overstrain any one part.

In other forms of exercise, the movements are restricted to a part or parts. They are reflex actions, which do not involve the intelligence in their execution. There is little space for precision and perfection, without extra expenditure of energy.

YOGA CAN BE PRACTISED AT ANY AGE

With advancing age, physically vigorous exercises cannot be performed easily because of stiffening joints and muscles that have lost tone. Isometric exercises, for example, cannot be practised with increasing age, as they lead to sprained muscles, painful joints, strained body systems, and the degeneration of organs. The great advantage of yoga is that it can be practised by anyone, irrespective of age, sex, and physical condition.

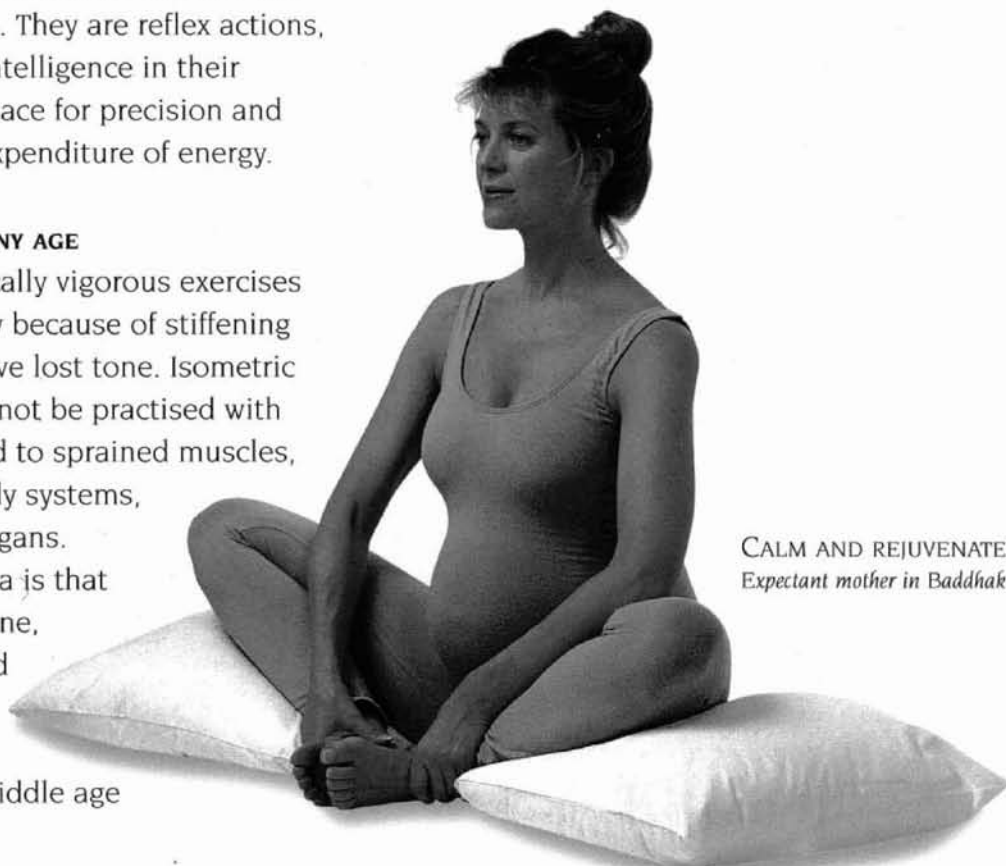
In fact, yoga is particularly beneficial in middle age

STRENGTHENING IMMUNITIES
*Children benefit from yoga as much
as adults do*



and after. Yoga is a gift to older people when the recuperative power of the body is declining and resistance to illness is weakened. Yoga generates energy and does not dissipate it. With yoga one can look forward to a satisfying, healthier future, rather than reflecting on one's youthful past.

Unlike other exercises, yoga results in the concentration of immunity cells in areas affected by disease, and thus improves immunity. That is why the ancient sages called yoga a therapeutic as well as a preventive science.



CALM AND REJUVENATED
Expectant mother in Baddhakonasana

Yoga & Stress

Yoga minimizes the impact of stress on the individual. Yogic science believes that the regular practice of asanas and pranayama strengthens the nervous system and helps people face stressful situations positively.

We have all experienced the way unrelieved tension results in both mental disorders and physical ill-health. This is not a modern phenomenon. In the centuries-old *Yoga Sutras*, the sage Patanjali attributed the causes of mental affliction to the ego, spiritual ignorance, desire, hatred of others, and attachment to life. He called these *kleshas* or “sorrows”.

ORIGINS OF STRESS

Through advances in science and technology, modern civilization has been able to conquer ignorance in many fields, but its pride in

grasp at in their desperate search for consolation. But while these measures may provide temporary distraction or oblivion, the root cause of unhappiness – stress – remains unresolved.

Yoga is not a miracle cure that can free a person from all stress, but it can help to minimize it. The worries of modern life deplete our reserves of bio-energy, because we draw on our vital energy from the storehouse – the nerve cells. This can, ultimately, exhaust our energy reserves and lead to the collapse of mental and physical equilibrium.

Yogic science believes that the nerves control the unconscious mind, and that when the nervous

“Regular practice of yoga can help you face the turmoil of life with steadiness and stability.”

technological achievement is excessive and misplaced. It has triggered widespread feelings of competitiveness and envy. Financial tensions, emotional upheavals, environmental pollution and, above all, a sense of being overtaken by the speed of events, have all increased the stress of daily life.

All these factors strain the body, causing nervous tension, and adversely affecting the mind. This is when feelings of isolation and loneliness take over.

To deal with this, people turn to artificial solutions to cope with the pressures of daily life. Substance abuse, eating disorders, and destructive relationships are some of the substitutes people

system is strong, a person faces stressful situations more positively. Asanas improve blood flow to all the cells of the body, revitalizing the nerve cells. This flow strengthens the nervous system and its capacity for enduring stress.

RELIEVING STRESS

The diaphragm, according to yogic science, is the seat of the intelligence of the heart and the window to the soul. During stressful situations, however, when you inhale and exhale, the diaphragm becomes too taut to alter its shape. Yogic exercises address this problem by developing elasticity in the

diaphragm, so that, when stretched, it can handle any amount of stress, whether intellectual, emotional, or physical.

The practice of asanas and pranayama helps to integrate the body, breath, mind, and intellect. Slow, effortless exhalation during practice of an asana brings serenity to the body cells, relaxes the facial muscles, and releases all tension from the organs of perception: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin.

When this happens, the brain, which is in constant communication with the organs of action, becomes *shunya*, or void, and all thoughts are stilled. Then, invading fears and anxieties cannot penetrate to the brain. When you develop this ability, you perform your daily activities with efficiency and economy. You do not dissipate your valuable bio-energy. You enter the state of true clarity of intellect. Your mind is free of stress and is filled with calm and tranquillity.



CHAPTER 2



*“Yoga is the union of
the individual self with the
universal self.”*

Philosophy of Yoga

Yoga is a fine art and seeks to express the artist's abilities to the fullest possible extent. While most artists need an instrument, such as a paintbrush or a violin, to express their art, the only instruments a yogi needs are his body and his mind. The ancient sages compared yoga to a fruit tree. From a single seed grow the roots, trunk, branches, and leaves. The leaves bring life-giving energy to the entire tree, which then blossoms into flowers and sweet, luscious fruit. Just as the fruit is the natural culmination of the tree, yoga, too, transforms darkness into light, ignorance into knowledge, knowledge into wisdom, and wisdom into unalloyed peace and spiritual bliss.

Philosophy of Asanas

Asanas, one of yoga's most significant "tools", help the sincere student develop physically and spiritually. The ancient sages believed that if you put your whole heart into your practice, you become a master of your circumstances and time.

Asanas are one of the major "tools" of yoga. Their benefits range from the physical level to the spiritual. That is why yoga is called *sarvaanga sadhana*, or holistic practice. "Asana" is the positioning of the body in various postures, with the total involvement of the mind and self, in order to establish communication between our external and internal selves.

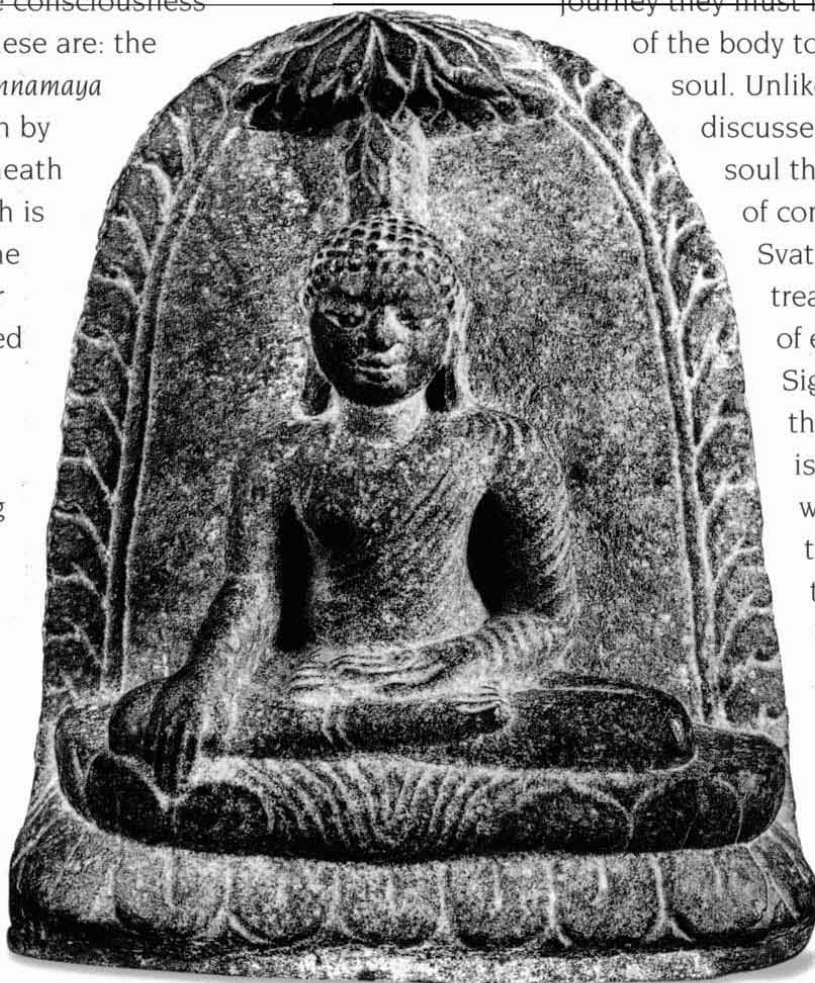
Yogic philosophy looks at the body as being made up of three layers and five sheaths. The three layers are: the causal body, or *karana sharira*, the subtle body, or *suksma sharira*, and the gross body, or *karya sharira*. Every individual functions in mind, matter, energy, and pure consciousness through five sheaths. These are: the anatomical sheath, or *annamaya kosha*, which is dealt with by asanas; the life-force sheath or *pranamaya kosha*, which is treated by pranayama; the psychological sheath, or *manomaya kosha*, is worked on by meditation; and the intellectual sheath, or *vijnamaya kosha*, is transformed by studying the scriptures with sincerity and discrimination. Once these goals are addressed, you reach the *anandamaya kosha*, or the sheath of bliss.

Yoga integrates the three layers of the body with the five

sheaths, enabling the individual to develop as a total being. The separation between the body and the mind, and the mind and the soul, then vanishes, as all planes fuse into one. In this way, asanas help to transform an individual by bringing him or her away from the awareness of the body toward the consciousness of the soul.

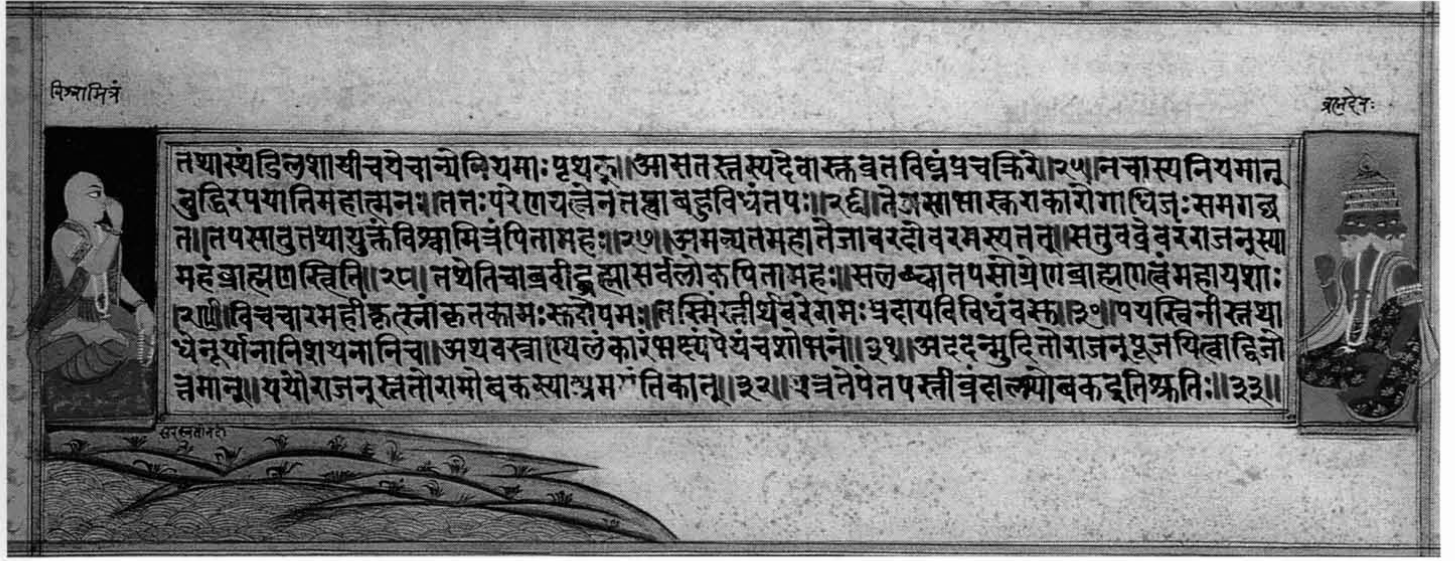
THE JOURNEY OF YOGA

The *Hathayoga Pradipika* is a practical treatise on yoga, thought to have been compiled in the 15th century. The author, the sage Svatanmarama, gives practical guidelines to beginners on the journey they must make from the culture of the body toward the vision of the soul. Unlike Patanjali, who discusses the sighting of the soul through the restraint of consciousness or *chitta*, Svatanmarama begins his treatise with the restraint of energy, or *prana*. Sighting the soul through the restraint of energy is called Hatha yoga, whereas sighting the soul through the restraint of consciousness is known as Raja yoga.



SAMADHI

The Buddha attaining enlightenment at Bodhgaya. The 3rd-century sculpture is from Sarnath, India



A FOLIO FROM THE ANCIENT INDIAN EPIC, THE MAHABHARATA.

The essentials of yoga philosophy are found in the Bhagvad Gita, which forms a part of the epic

In *Hathayoga Pradipika* 4.29, the author stresses the importance of the breath by saying that if the mind is the king of the senses, the master of the mind is breath. If breath is made to move rhythmically, with a controlled, sustained sound, the mind becomes calm. In that calmness, the king of the mind (the soul) becomes the supreme commander of the senses, mind, breath, as well as consciousness. When you learn to focus on the inhaled breath and the exhaled breath, you experience a neutralizing effect on the mind. This reaction led Svātmanā to conclude that the control of *prana* is the key to super-awareness or *samadhi*.

In the chapter *Samadhi Prakarana* of the *Hathayoga Pradipika*, Svātmanā gives glimpses of his experiences of *samadhi*. He says, "If one learns not to think of external things and simultaneously keeps away inner thoughts, one experiences *samadhi*. When the mind is dissolved in the sea of the soul, an absolute state of existence is reached. This is *kaivalya*, the freedom of emancipation."

The goal of yoga is a state of equilibrium and peace. Patanjali warns the student of yoga not to be deceived by this quietness, for it could lead to a state of *yogabhrastha* or "falling from the grace of yoga". He also says, "The practice of yoga must

continue, as it has to culminate in the sight of the soul." This stage, when the individual becomes one with the core of his or her being, is a stage known as *nirbija* (seedless) *samadhi*.

IMPACT OF YOGA

In his third chapter of the *Yoga Sutras*, *Vibhūti Pada*, Patanjali speaks of the effects of yoga. Although they seem exotic to our modern consciousness, they indicate the potential of the powers of human nature.

These spiritual powers and gifts have to be conquered in their turn. Otherwise, they become a trap, diverting the seeker from the true aim of yoga. When the soul is free from the bondage of body, mind, power, and pride of success, it reaches the state of *kaivalya* or freedom. This aspect is covered in the fourth chapter of the *Yoga Sutras*, *Kaivalya Padha*, the chapter on absolute liberation.



AJNA CHAKRA

This symbol represents the potential for spirituality in every individual

The person who practises yoga regularly will not become a victim but a master of his or her circumstances and time. The yoga practitioner lives to love and serve the world. This is the essence of life. Peace within and peace without, peace in the individual, in the family unit, in society, and in the world at large.

States of Mind

The mind is the vital link between the body and the consciousness. The individual can live with awareness, discrimination, and confidence only once the mind is calm and focused. Yoga is the alchemy that generates this equilibrium.

In yogic terminology, consciousness or *chitta* encompasses the mind or *manas*, intelligence or *buddhi*, and ego or *ahankara*. The Sanskrit word for man, *manusya* or *manava*, means "one who is endowed with this special consciousness". The mind does not have an actual location in the body. It is latent, elusive, and exists everywhere. The mind desires, wills, remembers, perceives, and experiences. Sensations of pain and pleasure, heat and cold, honour and dishonour, are experienced and interpreted by the mind. The mind reflects both the external and the internal worlds, but though it has the capacity to perceive things within and without, its natural tendency is to be preoccupied with the outside world.

NATURE OF THE MIND

When the mind is fully absorbed by objects seen, heard, smelled, felt, or tasted, this leads to stress, fatigue, and unhappiness. The mind can be a secret enemy and a treacherous friend. It influences our behaviour before we have the time to consider causes and consequences. Yoga trains the mind and inculcates a sense of discrimination, so that objects and events are seen for what they are and are not allowed to gain mastery over us.

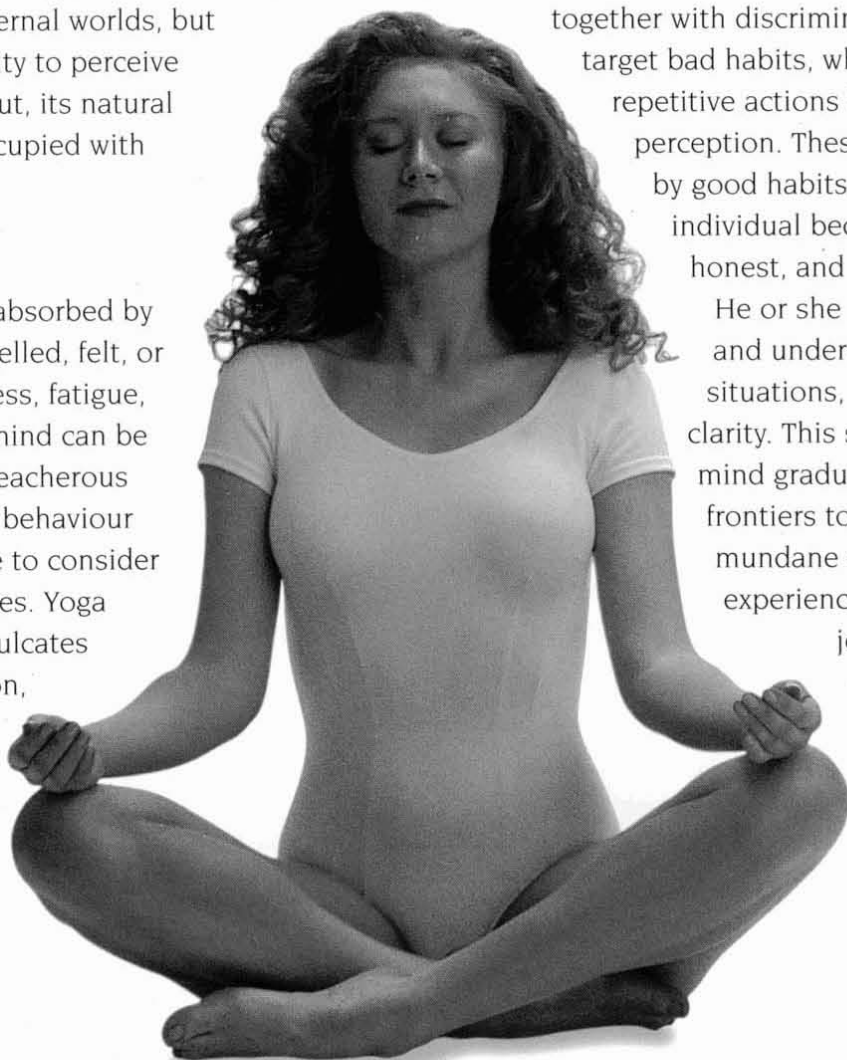
FIVE MENTAL FACULTIES

We have five mental faculties which can be used in a positive or a negative way. These are: correct observation and knowledge, perception, imagination, dreamless sleep, and memory. Sometimes the mind loses its stability and clarity, and is either incapable of using its various faculties properly, or uses them in a negative way. The practice of yoga leads us to use these mental faculties in a positive way, thereby bringing the mind to a discriminative and attentive state. Awareness, together with discrimination and memory, target bad habits, which are essentially repetitive actions based on mistaken perception. These are then replaced by good habits. In this way, an individual becomes stronger, honest, and gains maturity.

He or she is able to perceive and understand people, situations, and events with clarity. This seasoned, mature mind gradually transcends its frontiers to reach beyond mundane observation and experience, making the journey from confusion to clarity, one of the greatest benefits of yoga.

CLARITY OF MIND

Practising yoga gives you the ability to recognize situations for what they are, and to deal with them



“The seasoned, mature mind transcends frontiers to reach beyond mundane observation.”

DIFFERENT STATES OF MIND

Yogic science distinguishes between five basic states of mind. These are not grouped in stages, nor are they, except the last, unchangeable. According to Patanjali, these states of mind are: dull and lethargic, distracted, scattered, focused, and controlled. Patanjali described the lowest level of the mind as dull or *mudha*. A person in this state of mind is disinclined to observe, act, or react. This state is rarely inherent or permanent. It is usually

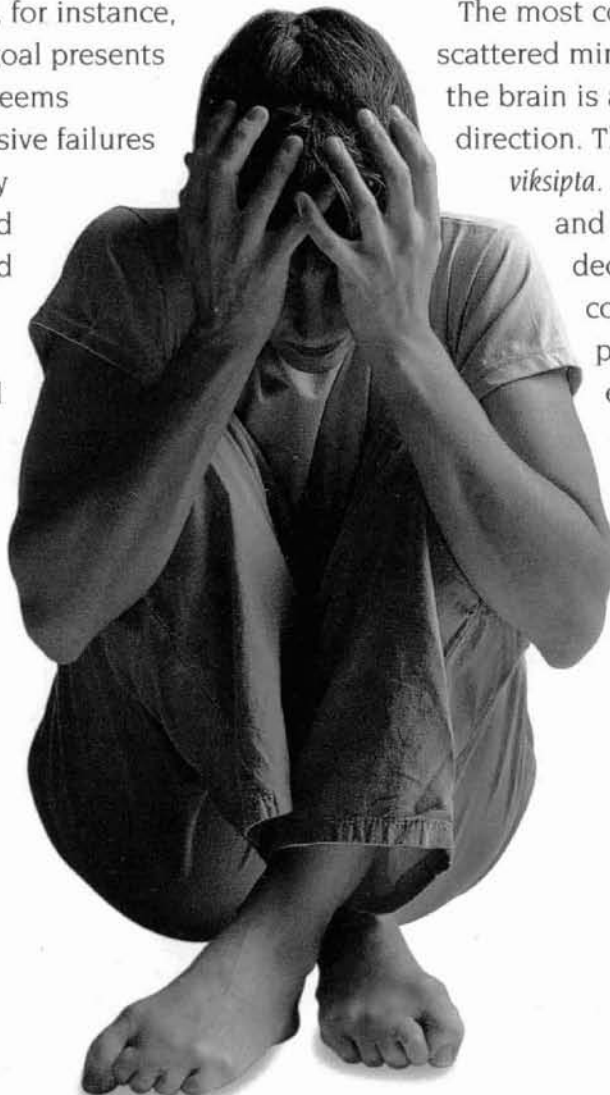
caused by a traumatic experience, for instance, bereavement, or when a desired goal presents so many obstacles that the goal seems impossible to attain. After successive failures to take control of their lives, many people withdraw into dullness and lethargy. Often, this is exacerbated by either insomnia or oversleeping, comfort-eating, or the ingestion of tranquilizers and other substances which make the original problem worse. Yoga gradually transforms this feeling of defeat and helplessness into optimism and energy. The distracted state of mind is one where thoughts, feelings, and perceptions churn around in the consciousness, but leave no

lasting impressions and hence serve no purpose. Patanjali calls this state, *kshipta*. Someone in a state of *kshipta* is unstable, unable to prioritize or focus on goals, usually because of flawed signals from the senses of perception he or she accepts and follows unthinkingly. This clouds the intellect and disturbs mental equilibrium. Such a state has to be calmed and brought to confront the factual knowledge of reality through the regular practice of yoga asanas and pranayama.

The most common state of mind is the scattered mind. In such a state, though the brain is active, it lacks purpose and direction. This state of mind is known as *vikshipta*. Constantly plagued by doubt and fear, it alternates between decisiveness and lack of confidence. The regular practice of yoga gradually encourages the seeds of awareness and discrimination to take root, giving rise to a positive attitude and mental equilibrium.

THE DISTURBED MIND

Unable to concentrate, resisting realities, and lurching between priorities, this state of mind responds to the practice of yoga



The ancient sages characterized the focused state of mind, or *ekagra*, as one that indicated a higher state of being. This is a liberated mind which has confronted afflictions and obstacles and conquered them. Such a mind has direction, concentration, and awareness. A person in this category of mental intelligence lives in the present without being caught in the past or future, undisturbed by external circumstances.

The fifth and highest state of mind is *niruddha*, or the controlled, restrained mind. According to Patanjali, *niruddha* is attained through the persistent practice of yoga, which allows an individual to conquer the lower levels of the mind.

At this level, the mind is linked exclusively with the object of its attention. It has the power to become totally absorbed in an activity, allowing nothing to disturb its absorption. When the brain is quiet, the intellect is at peace, the individual is serene and balanced, neither free nor bound, but poised in pure consciousness.

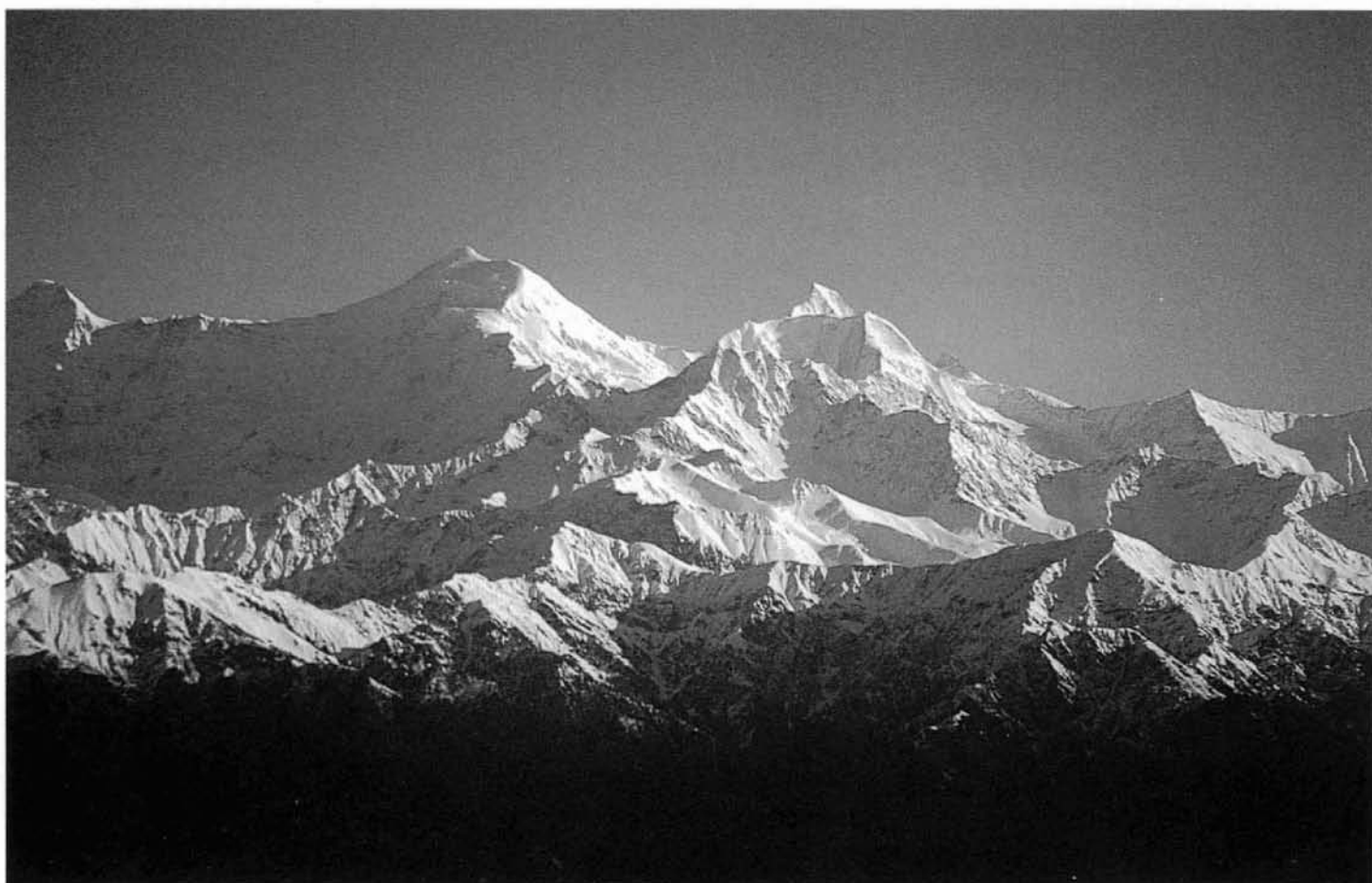


AN ENLIGHTENED MIND

The Buddha teaching his disciples the value of truth and contentment, from a frieze found at Sarnath, India

THE FINAL STAGE

The persistent practice of yoga allows you to conquer the lower levels of the mind and reach the peaks of self-realization



Eight Limbs

The basic tenets of yoga are described in the form of "eight limbs" or "steps" described by the sage, Patanjali. These are aphorisms, explaining the codes of ethical behaviour which will ultimately lead to self-realization.



STEPS TO SELF-REALIZATION

Understand and absorb each stage to reach the ultimate goal

The sage Patanjali reflected on the nature of man and the norms of society during his time. Then, very systematically, he expressed his observations in the form of aphorisms, which deal with the entire span of life, beginning with a code of correct conduct and ending with the ultimate goal, emancipation and freedom. These aphorisms outline the fundamental tenets of yoga, known as the eight limbs or *astanga*.

ASTANGA YOGA

The eight limbs or steps are *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*. These are sequential stages in an individual's life journey through yoga. Each step must be understood and followed to attain the ultimate goal of Astanga yoga, that of emancipation of the self. *Yama*, or general ethical principles, and *niyama*, or self-restraint, prescribe a code of conduct that moulds individual morality and behaviour. *Asanas*, or yogic poses, and *pranayama*, or breath control, discipline the body and the mind by basic practices conducive to physical, physiological, psychological, and mental health. *Pranayama* controls the mind, taming baser instincts, while *pratyahara*, or detachment from the

external world, stems the outgoing flow of the senses, withdrawing those of perception and the organs of action from worldly pleasures. *Dharana*, or concentration, guides the consciousness to focus attention rigorously on one point. *Dhyana*, or prolonged concentration, saturates the mind until it permeates to the source of existence, and the intellectual and conscious energy dissolves in the seat of the soul. It is then that *samadhi*, when you lose the sense of your separate existence, is attained. Nothing else remains except the core of one's being: the soul.

YAMA

Yama and *niyama* require tremendous inner discipline. *Yama* explains the codes of ethical behaviour to be observed

and followed in everyday life, reminding us of our responsibilities as social beings. *Yama* has 5 principles. These are: *ahimsa* or non-violence, *asteya* or freedom from avarice, *satya* or truthfulness, *brahmacharya* or chastity, and *aparigraha* or freedom from desire. *Ahimsa* needs introspection to replace negative, destructive thoughts and actions by positive, constructive ones. Anger, cruelty, or harassment of others are facets of the violence latent in all of us.

These contradict the principles of *ahimsa*, while lying, cheating, dishonesty, and deception break the principles of *satya*. *Brahmacharya* does not mean total abstinence, but denotes a disciplined sexual life, promoting contentment and moral strength from within. *Parigraha* means "possession" or "covetousness", the instinct within all of us that traps us in the *karmic* cycle of reincarnation after death. However, while you may be able to give up material possessiveness, what about emotional or intellectual possessiveness? This is where Astanga yoga helps to discipline the mind, freeing it from the desire to possess, bringing it into a state of *aparigraha*, freedom from desire, as well as *asteya*, or freedom from greed.

NIYAMA

Niyama is the positive current that brings discipline, removes inertia, and gives shape to the inner desire to follow the yogic path. The principles of *niyama* are *saucha*, or cleanliness, *santosa*, or contentment, *tapas*, or austerity, *svadhyaya*, or the study of one's own self, which includes the body, mind, intellect, and ego. The final principle of *niyama* is *isvara pranidhana* or devotion to God. Contentment or *santosa* helps to curb desire, anger, ambition, and greed, while *tapas* or austerity involves self-discipline and the desire to purify the body, senses, and mind. The study and practice of yoga with devotional attention to the self and God is *tapas*.

ASANAS, PRANAYAMA, AND PRATYAHARA

According to the *Gheranda Samhita*, a text dating to the 15th century, written by the yogic sage, Gheranda: "The body soon decays like unbaked earthen pots thrown in water. Strengthen and purify

the body by baking it in the fire of yoga." Performing an asana helps to create and generate energy. Staying in an asana organizes and distributes this energy, while coming out of the pose protects the energy, preventing it from dissipating. In *Yoga Sutra* 111.47, Patanjali explains the effects of an asana as "*Rupa lavanya bala vaira samhnananatvani kayasampat*". This means that a perfected body has beauty, grace, and strength which is comparable to the hardness and brilliance of a diamond. While practising an asana, one must focus attention on the inner body, drawing the mind inward to sharpen the intelligence.

Then, the asana becomes effortless as the blemishes on both the gross and the subtle body are washed off. This is the turning point in the practice of asanas, when the body, mind, and self unite. From this state begins the *isvara pranidhana*, or devotion to God. Asanas and pranayama are interrelated and inter-woven. Patanjali clearly specifies that pranayama should be attempted only after the asanas are mastered. *Prana* is "vital energy", which includes will power and ambition, while *ayama*

means "stretch, expansion and extension". Pranayama can be described as the "expansion and extension of energy or life-force". Patanjali begins pranayama with the simple movement of breathing, leading us deeper and deeper into ourselves by teaching us to observe the very act of respiration. Pranayama has three movements – prolonged inhalation, deep exhalation, and prolonged, stable retention, all of which have to be performed with precision. Pranayama is the actual process of directing energy inward, making the mind fit for *pratyahara* or the detachment of the senses, which



POSITIVE CURRENTS
Focus on your inner body and draw
the mind inward

evolves from pranayama. When the senses withdraw from objects of desire, the mind is released from the power of the senses, which in turn become passive. Then the mind turns inward and is set free from the tyranny of the senses. This is *pratyahara*.

SAMAYAMA – TOWARD THE LIBERATION OF THE SELF

Patanjali groups *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi* under the term *samayama* – the integration of the body, breath, mind, intellect, and self. It is not easy to explain the last three aspects of yoga as separate entities. The controlled mind that is gained in *pratyahara* is made to intensify its attention on a single thought in *dharana*. When this concentration is prolonged, it becomes *dhyana*. In *dhyana*, release,

expansion, quietness, and peace are experienced. This prolonged state of quietness frees an individual from attachment, resulting in indifference to the joys of pleasure or the sorrows of pain. The experience of *samadhi* is achieved when the knower, the knowable, and the known become one. When the object of meditation engulfs the meditator and becomes the subject, self-awareness is lost. This is *samadhi* – a state of total absorption. *Sama* means “level” or “alike”, while *adhi* means “over” and “above”. It also denotes the maintenance of the intelligence in a balanced state. Though *samadhi* can be explained at the intellectual level, it can only be experienced at the level of the heart. Ultimately, it is *samadhi* that is the fruit of the discipline of Astanga yoga.

Pranayama

Prana is the life-force which permeates both the individual as well as the universe at all levels. It is at once physical, sexual, mental, intellectual, spiritual, and cosmic. Prana, the breath, and the mind are inextricably linked to each other.

The ancient yogis advocated the practice of pranayama to unite the breath with the mind, and thus with the *prana* or life-force. *Prana* is energy, and *ayama* is the storing and distribution of that energy. *Ayama* has three aspects or movements: vertical extension, horizontal extension, and cyclical extension. By practising pranayama, we learn to move energy vertically, horizontally, and cyclically to the frontiers of the body.

BREATH IN PRANAYAMA

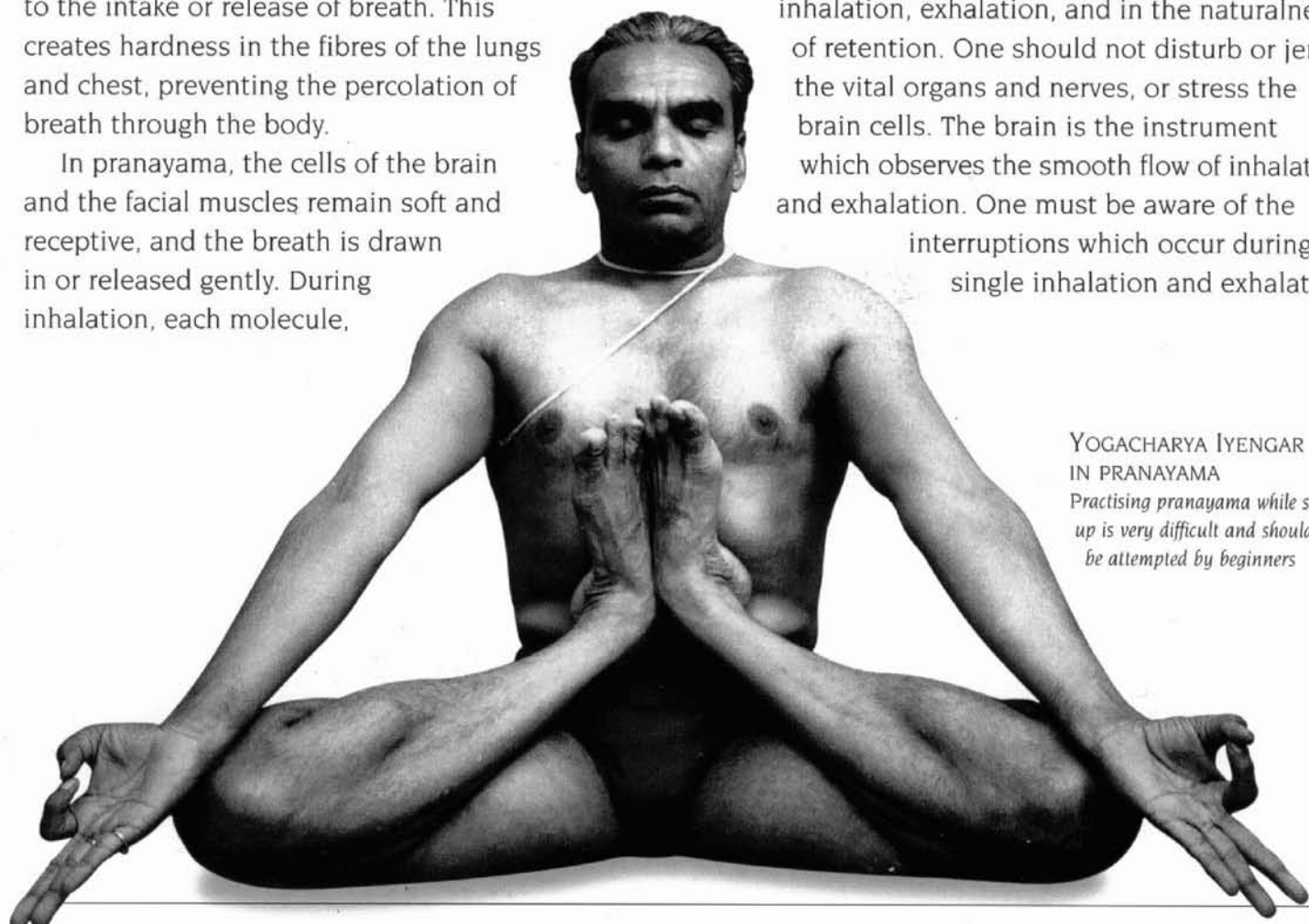
Pranayama is not deep breathing. Deep breathing tenses the facial muscles, makes the skull and scalp rigid, tightens the chest, and applies external force to the intake or release of breath. This creates hardness in the fibres of the lungs and chest, preventing the percolation of breath through the body.

In pranayama, the cells of the brain and the facial muscles remain soft and receptive, and the breath is drawn in or released gently. During inhalation, each molecule,

fibre, and cell of the body is independently felt by the mind, and is allowed to receive and absorb the *prana*. There are no sudden movements and one becomes aware of the gradual expansion of the respiratory organs, and feels the breath reaching the remotest parts of the lungs.

In exhalation, the release of breath is gradual, and this gives the air cells sufficient time to re-absorb the residual *prana* to the maximum possible extent. This allows for the full utilization of energy, thus building up emotional stability and calming the mind.

The practice of asanas removes the obstructions which impede the flow of *prana*. During pranayama, one should be totally absorbed in the fineness of inhalation, exhalation, and in the naturalness of retention. One should not disturb or jerk the vital organs and nerves, or stress the brain cells. The brain is the instrument which observes the smooth flow of inhalation and exhalation. One must be aware of the interruptions which occur during a single inhalation and exhalation.



YOGACHARYA IYENGAR
IN PRANAYAMA

Practising pranayama while sitting up is very difficult and should not be attempted by beginners

Check these, and a smooth flow will set in. Similarly, during retention of breath, learn to retain the first indrawn breath with stability. If this stability is lost, it is better to release the breath, rather than strain to hold it. While inhaling or retaining the breath in a pranayamic cycle, remember to ensure that the abdomen does not swell.

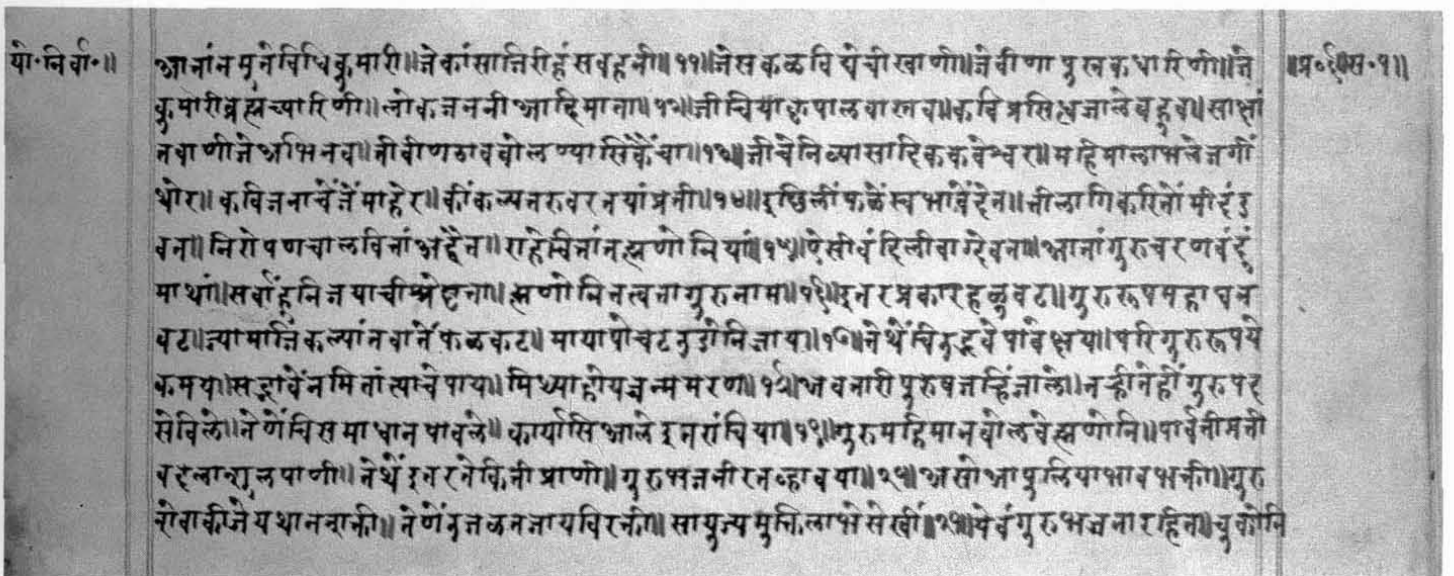
THE FINAL GOAL

Attempt pranayama only when the yoga asanas have been mastered. Patanjali reiterates this several times, most emphatically in *Yoga Sutra* II, 49. The next *sutra*, *Yoga Sutra* II, 50, explains that inhalation, exhalation, and retention must be precise. The *sutra* begins with control over the movement of exhalation, or *bahya*, and inhalation, or *abhyantara*. Each inhalation activates the central nervous system into stimulating the peripheral nerves, and each exhalation triggers the reverse process. During the retention of breath, both processes take place. The *Hathayoga Pradipika* speaks of *antara-kumbhaka* and *bahya-kumbhaka*, or the suspension of breath with empty or full lungs, as well as inhalation, and exhalation. Pranayama is a complex process composed of all these. It has to be practised with the greatest sincerity and precision. You cannot achieve pranayama just because you want to – you have to be ready for it.



A YOGI IN PRANAYAMA

For more than a thousand years, sages have practised pranayama, controlling their breath and with it, their mind



ANCIENT TRADITIONS

An illustrated folio from the *Kalpasutra*, 15th-century texts describing the path to health and spirituality

SPIRITUAL PRANAYAMA

The pranayamic mind blossoms, becomes completely free, and dissolves in the self

In pranayamic breathing, the brain is quiet, and this allows the nervous system to function more effectively. Inhalation is the art of receiving primeval energy into the body in the form of breath, and bringing the spiritual cosmic breath into contact with the individual breath. Exhalation is the removal of toxins from the system.

BETWEEN THE MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL WORLD

Pranayama is also the link between the physiological and spiritual organisms of man. At first, pranayama is difficult and requires great effort. Mastery is achieved when pranayama becomes effortless. Just as the diaphragm is the meeting point of the physiological and spiritual body, the retention of

energy or *kumbhaka* is realizing the very core of your body. Once the external movements are controlled, there is internal silence. In such a silence there is no thought as the mind has then dissolved in the self.

In the *Hathayoga Pradipika*, the sage Svatmarama gives a detailed description of the ways in which an individual comes to experience the elevated state of oneness with the self through the practice of pranayama. Hence, practising it is not only very difficult, but also highly absorbing. If you fail after a few cycles, be content with the knowledge that you have practised three or four cycles with awareness and attention. Do not turn away from failures. Accept them and learn from them. Gradually, you will learn to master pranayama.

Chakras

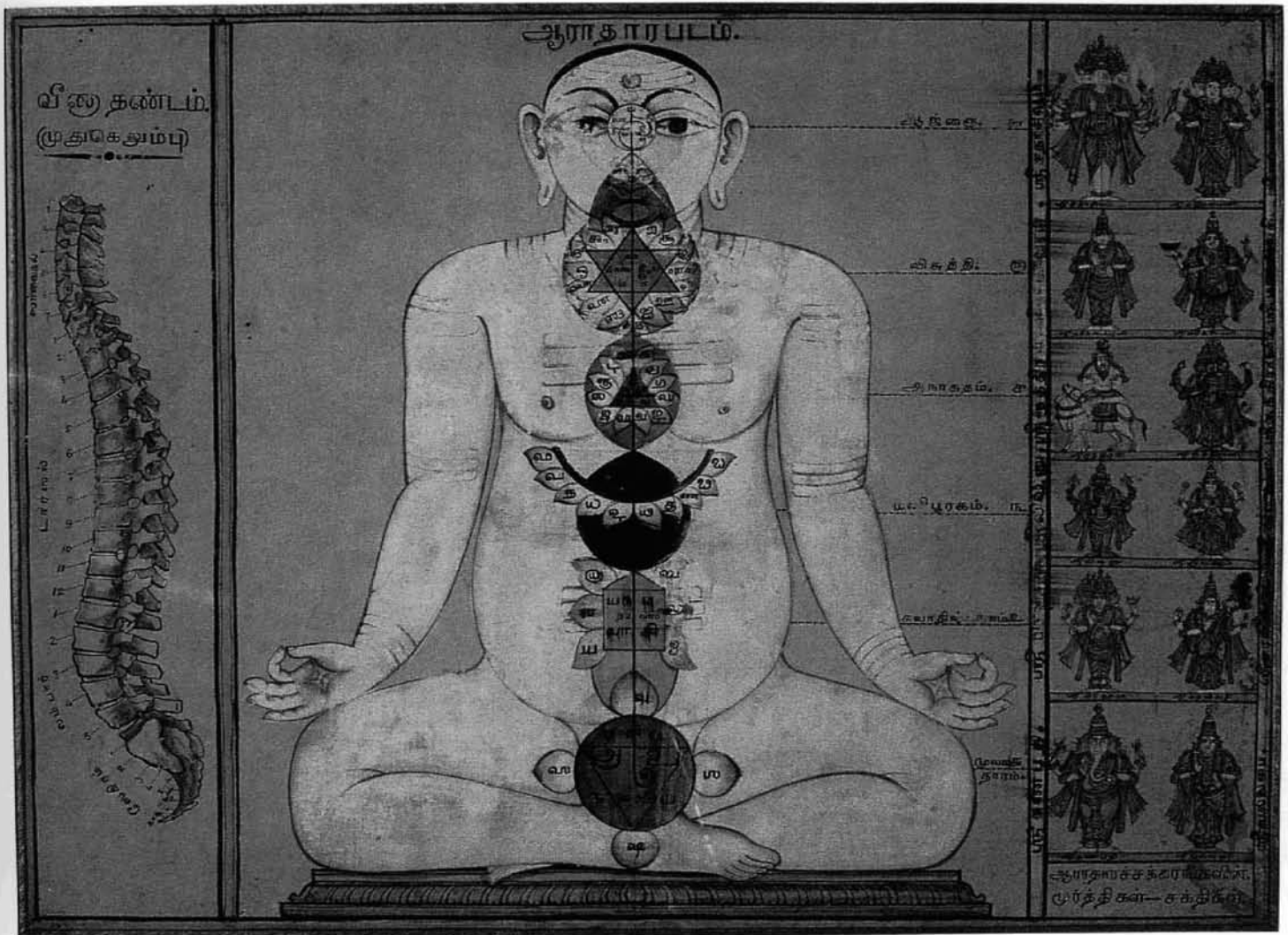
Yogic science recognizes that spiritual health is activated by a system of chakras or 'nerve' centres, said to be located within the spinal column. Cosmic energy lies coiled within these chakras and has to be awakened for self-realization.

Modern technology has provided us with the means to examine the state of our bodies. But nothing has helped us discern character, personality, or the potential for goodness. The most important aspect of a human being is the part which lies between the outer skin and the innermost soul – the *shakti*, which includes the mind, intellect,



emotions, vital energy, the sense of "I", the powers of will and discrimination, and the conscience. These are different in every human being, and that makes us individually both mysterious and unique.

In yogic terminology, the soul is called *purusha shakti*, while *prakriti shakti* or the energy of nature, came to be called *kundalini* by the ancient yogis.



THE 7 MAIN CHAKRAS OF THE BODY

Yogic sages believed chakras were located along the spinal column



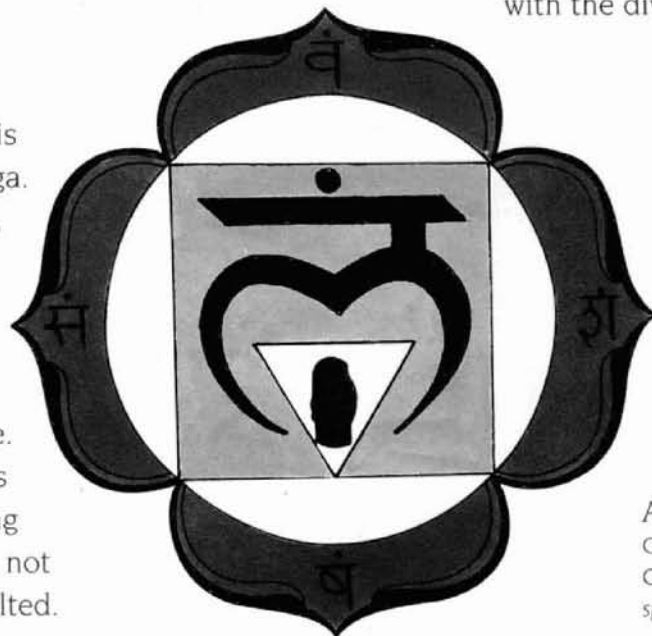
EACH CELL IS AN ENTITY

Energy spreads through a leaf, from each tiny cell connected to the other, permeating from the stalks to the entire plant

Kundalini is the divine, cosmic energy which exists as a latent force in everyone. When the *prakriti shakti* is awakened, it gravitates toward the very core of the soul or *purusha shakti*.

AWAKENING COSMIC ENERGY

This fire of divine, cosmic energy is ignited by *yoga-agni*, the fire of yoga. When a fire is covered with ashes, it goes out. In the same way, if our senses are inert, or if we are motivated by pride, self-indulgence, and envy, the *kundalini* is kept in a dormant state. If we allow such negative qualities to dominate our thinking over long periods, our spiritual evolution is not merely hampered, but actually halted.



A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF THE MULADHARA CHAKRA
Chakras transform cosmic energy into spiritual energy

We have always known that health is important, but it is time to realize, as proponents of yoga have known for generations, that our physical condition is inextricably linked to our state of mind.

Yogic science recognized this connection from the very beginning. In order to achieve perfect physical health, the ancient sages concluded, you must activate the body's *chakras*. *Chakras* are notionally located along the spine, from the brain to the tailbone. But while the spine is a physical entity, *chakras* are not composed of matter. Although they possess no physicality, they govern all the elements of the body.

THE MEANING OF CHAKRAS

Chakra means "wheel" or "ring" in Sanskrit and our personal *chakras* have energy coiled within them. They are the critical junctions which determine the state of the body and mind. Just as the brain controls physical, mental, and intellectual functions through the nerve cells or neurons, *chakras* tap the *prana* or cosmic energy which is within all living beings and transform it into spiritual energy. This is spread through the body by the *nadis*, or channels.

Being invisible, *chakras* are tangible only through their effects. They can be accessed once the student of yoga has achieved all the eight aspects of yoga (see page 29), when the human self merges with the divine self.

SAHASRARA CHAKRA
UNCOILED THROUGH
INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE, IT
ALLOWS THE SEEKER TO
ACHIEVE FREEDOM

VISHUDDHI CHAKRA
SEAT OF INTELLECTUAL
AWARENESS

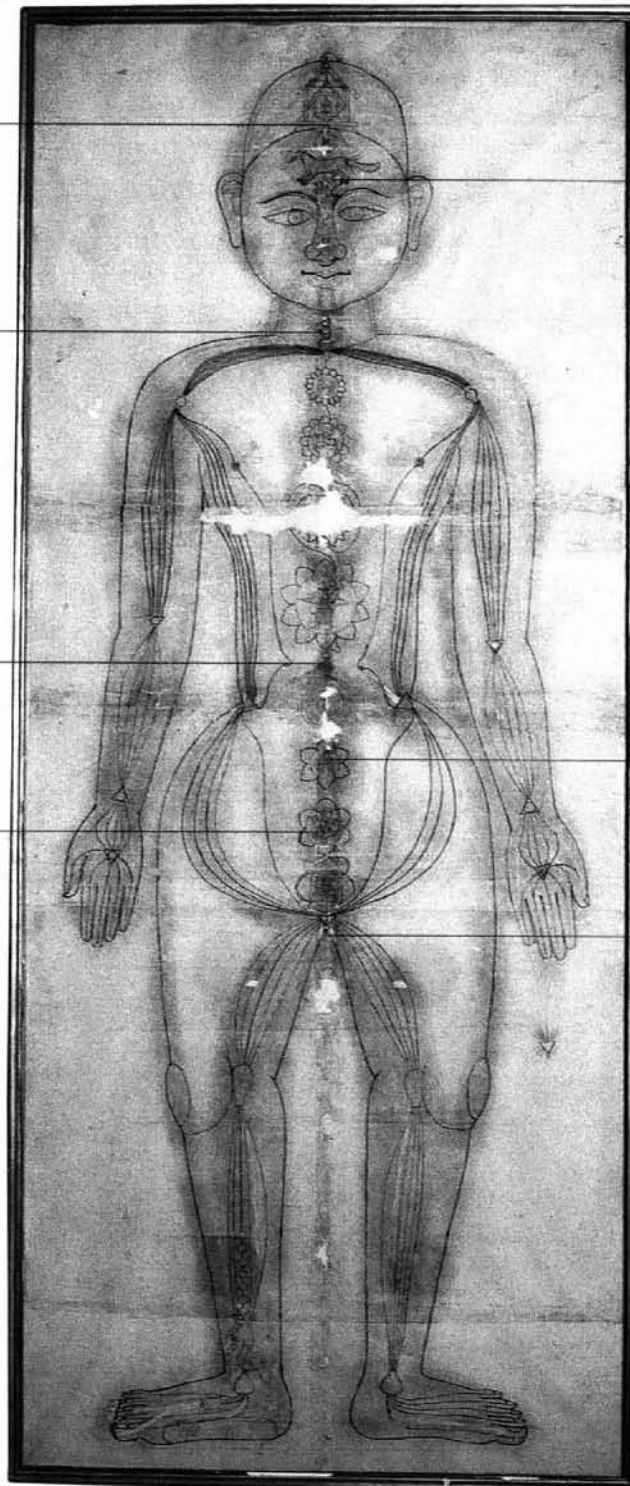
ANAHATA CHAKRA
WHEN UNCOILED,
IT DEVELOPS COMPASSION,
SPIRITUALITY, AND
KNOWLEDGE

SWADHISTANA CHAKRA
INFLUENCES WORLDLY
DESIRES WHEN COILED

AJNA CHAKRA
INFLUENCES PRIDE AND
DESIRE WHEN COILED.
DEVELOPS HUMANITY
AND SPIRITUALITY WHEN
UNCOILED

MANIPURAKA CHAKRA
SITE OF THE SENSE OF
FEAR; WHEN UNCOILED,
INDUCES CALM

MULADHARA CHAKRA
THE FOUNDATION OF
THE ANATOMICAL
SHEATH CONTROLS
SEXUAL ENERGY
WHEN COILED



CHAKRAS AND NADIS
OF THE HUMAN BODY
A 19th-century painting from
Rajasthan, India

There are 11 *chakras* of which 7 are crucial (see diagram above), and the others dependent. The most important is the Sahasrara *chakra*, where *prakriti shakti* or energy, unites with *purusha shakti*, or soul.

The practice of yoga is directed at awakening the divine energy within every human being. Asanas and pranayama uncoil and alert the *chakras*. In the process, the *nadis* are activated. This causes the

chakras to vibrate and to generate energy, which is then circulated all over the body through the *nadis*. The emotions rooted in the *chakras* are transformed as divine energy is awakened and circulated.

To achieve self-realization the sincere student of yoga will, with persistent, rigorous practice, conquer the 6 main obstacles to happiness – desire, anger, greed, infatuation, pride, and envy.

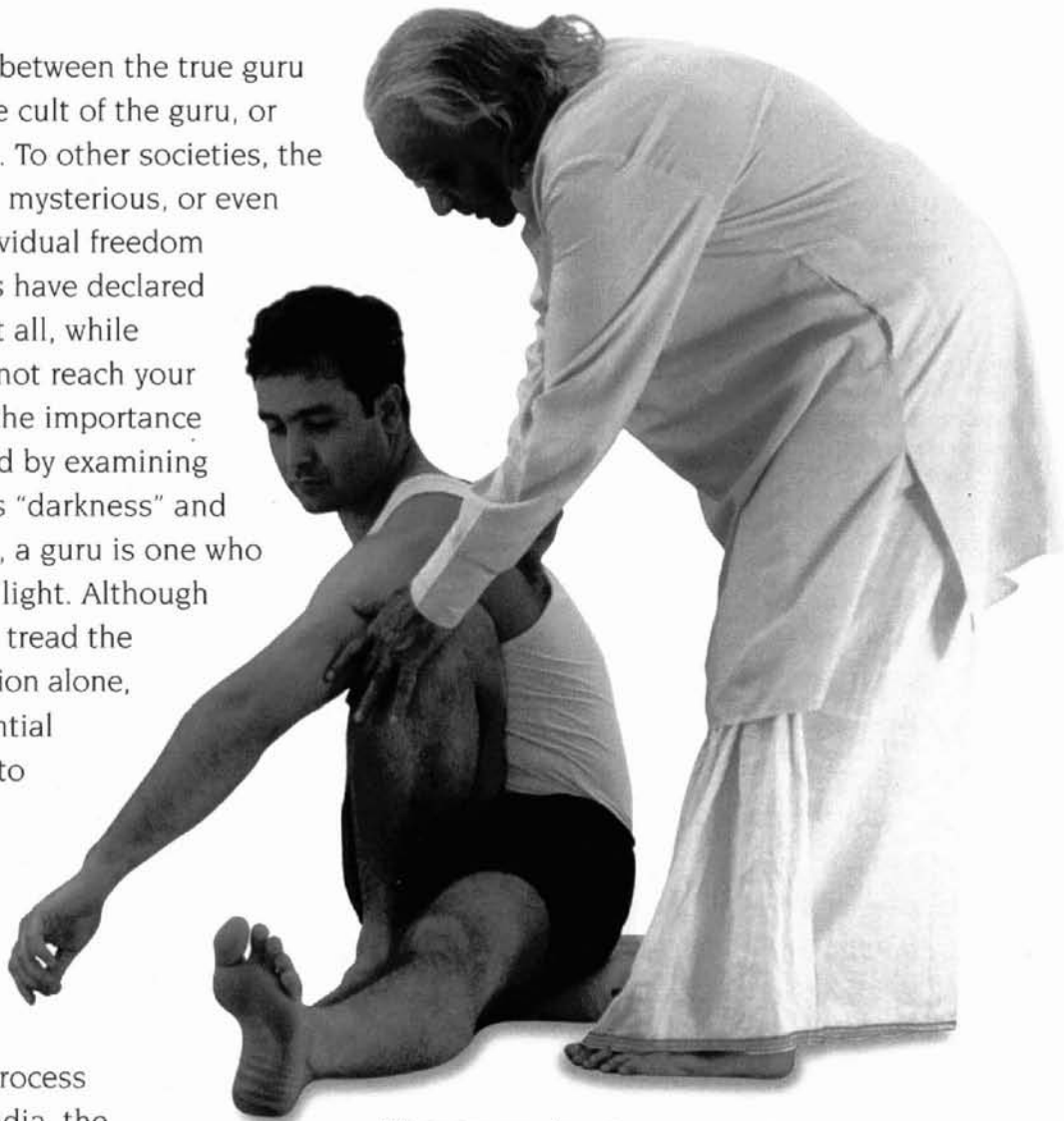
The Guru & the Yogi

The tradition of the guru, or master, and the yogi, or disciple, is an ancient one. All learning from generation to generation has been handed down this way. The guru must be compassionate, yet exacting. The yogi must be sincere and dedicated.

How do we distinguish between the true guru and the false one? The cult of the guru, or master, is an Asian concept. To other societies, the concept might seem exotic, mysterious, or even abhorrent – a brake on individual freedom or judgment. Some thinkers have declared that a guru is not needed at all, while others believe that you cannot reach your goal without one. Perhaps the importance of the guru can be explained by examining its Sanskrit root. *Gu* means “darkness” and *ru* means “light” – therefore, a guru is one who leads you from darkness to light. Although the *sadhaka* or seeker has to tread the spiritual path to self-realization alone, the guru's guidance is essential to show the right path and to safeguard the yogi, the student of yoga, who decides to follow it.

AN ANCIENT TRADITION

The guru is the voice of consciousness during the process of spiritual awakening. In India, the relationship between a guru and a disciple is an ancient tradition, and has been the foundation of all learning. The *guru-sishya parampara* (*sishya* means “disciple” and *parampara* means “tradition”) has been the system through which knowledge has been handed down, generation to generation and age to age. The energy that the guru has imbibed from his teacher is passed on to his disciple, keeping the process of communication alive from one epoch to the next. The guru opens the disciple's eyes to awareness. Knowledge exists, but ignorance veils it,



YOGACHARYA IYENGAR WITH A STUDENT

The guru does not only teach asanas, he teaches you how to live

and it is the guru who removes this veil from the intellect of the *sishya*. The guru is the guide who opens the gate of the student's dormant faculties and awakens the latent power and energy within. Being with the guru is like being in the sunlight, and the glow lasts for eternity.

The relationship between the teacher and the disciple is a unique one. It is similar, but not identical, to a mother and child. Just as a mother

loves, nourishes, guides, cajoles into obedience, rebukes, educates, and protects her child, the guru takes the disciple into his care, making it his life's work to mould his student into perfect shape, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

THE GURU

Yoga is a discipline and the yogic texts aptly begin with the emphasis on discipline or *anusasanami*: "Without discipline, nothing can be achieved." The guru does not enforce discipline with strictness, but builds up an awareness of it in his student, allowing the latter to develop inner discipline. A wise guru does not lay down codes of conduct, but motivates the disciple by precept and example.

The guru does not demand attention, he commands it. In the process of teaching, he creates total confidence in the disciple, and helps him or her develop the will power to face all circumstances with equanimity. The guru constantly improves on his teaching techniques, opening the disciple's eyes, improvising where necessary to create new dimensions in his teaching. The guru is compassionate, but does not expect emotional attachment from his disciple, nor does he become emotionally attached himself.

The guru should be confident, challenging, caring, cautious, constructive, and courageous. The clarity and creativity of his teaching should reflect his devotion and dedication to his subject – in this case, the complexities and subtleties of yoga.

THE DISCIPLE

An ideal disciple is obedient, earnest, serious, and always ready to follow the teachings of his or her guru. This is not unthinking obedience, but one based on respect and a sincere desire to learn. Disciples can be dull, average, or superior. The dull student has little enthusiasm, is unstable, timorous, and self-indulgent. He or she is unwilling to put in the hard work required which is needed to attain the goal of self-realization.

The average student is indecisive, attracted equally to worldly pleasures as to spiritual matters.

While conscious of the highest good, this student lacks the determination to persevere, and is unable to hold on steadfastly to the yogic path. He or she needs firmness and discipline from his or her guru, a fact the guru recognizes at once.

The superior or intense student, on the other hand, has vision, enthusiasm, and courage. He or she resists temptations and does not hesitate to cast off qualities that distract him or her from the goal. This student becomes steady, stable, and skilful. The guru guides this kind of student to the ultimate goal of self-realization.



A SAGE TEACHING HIS PUPILS

This 2nd-century BC frieze from Bharhut, India, points to the antiquity of the guru-yogi tradition

While practising yoga, the disciple must recall and deliberate on each word and action of the guru and consolidate each learning experience. Today's disciple may become the guru of tomorrow. Clarity of mind and firmness of resolve to tread the path to self-realization is essential. The yogi must have *riti* and *niti* – method and morality – to impart to the disciple, the learning, the experience, and wisdom gleaned over the years. Thus, the tradition of the guru and the yogi is carried on for yet another generation.

This book is my attempt to disseminate my knowledge of yoga to all those across the world who wish to become true followers of yoga.





*“The body is your temple.
Keep it pure and clean for the
soul to reside in.”*

Asanas for You

The science of yoga is like the art of music. There is a rhythm within the body, and that can only be maintained by paying attention to each step of the asana, and to the progression between asanas. In your practice of yoga, there has to be a physical, physiological, psychological, and spiritual rhythm. Unless there is harmony and melody, the music will not be worth listening to. The body is a truly sensitive and receptive instrument, and its vibrations, like sound, express the harmony or dissonance within it. Each of these vibrations must synchronize in the movement, which is the asana.

Classic Poses

Yoga asanas cover the basic positions of standing, sitting, forward bends, twists, inversions, back bends, and lying down. The 23 classic poses must be practised with physical co-ordination, as well as intelligence and sincerity.

There is more to practising asanas correctly than merely the physical aligning of the body. The classic poses, when practised with discrimination and awareness, bring the body, mind, intelligence, nerves, consciousness, and the self together into a single, harmonious whole. Asanas may appear to deal with the physical body alone but, in fact, different asanas can affect the chemical messages sent to and from the brain, improving and stabilizing your mental state. Yoga's unique ability to soothe the nerves – the medium between the physiological body and the psychological body – calms the brain, makes the mind fresh and tranquil, and relaxes the entire body.

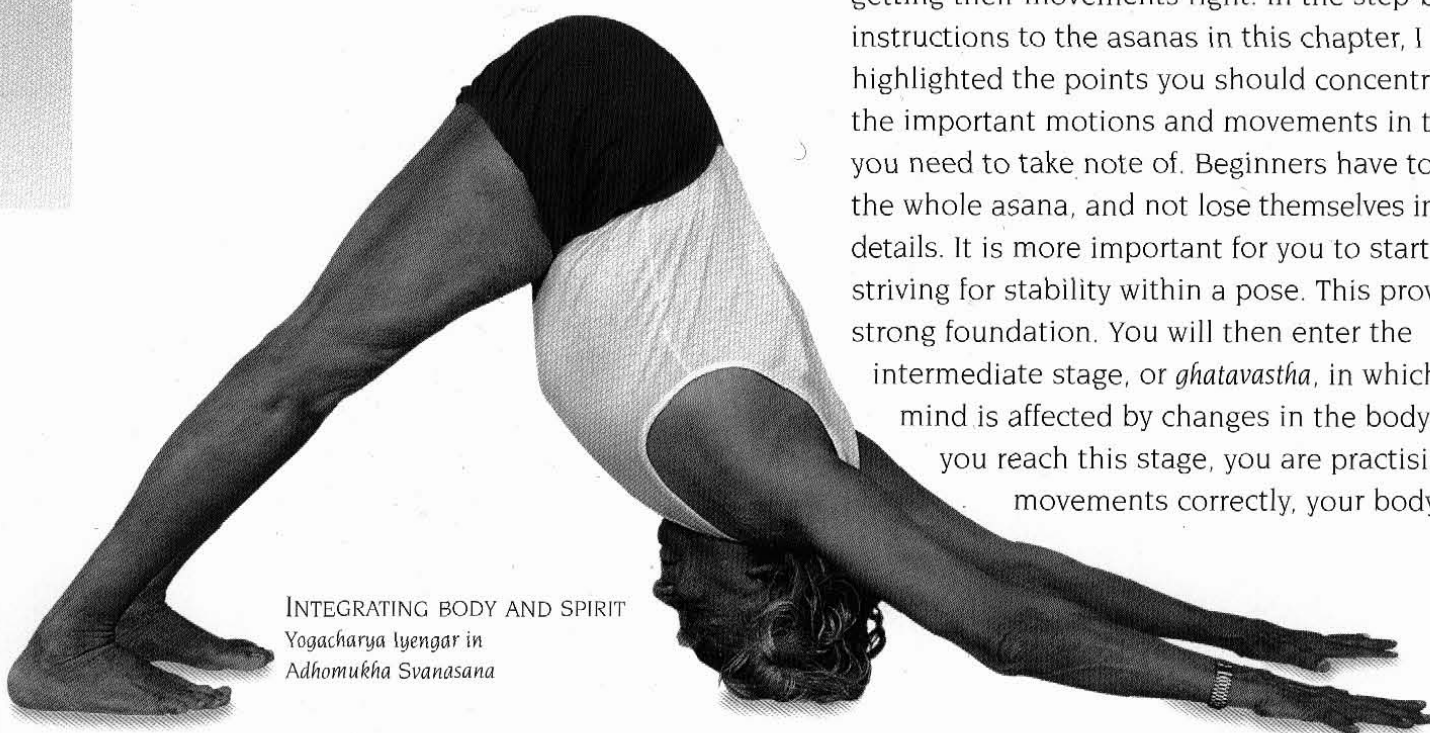
I have selected these 23 asanas because they cover all the basic positions of yoga: standing, sitting, forward bends, twists, inversions, back bends, and lying down. The regular practice of these asanas, stimulates and activates all the organs,

tissues, and cells of the body. The mind becomes alert and strong, the body healthy and active.

The anatomical body comprises the limbs and the actual parts of the body. The physical body is made up of bones, muscles, skin, and tissue. The physiological body is composed of the heart, lungs, liver, spleen, pancreas, intestines, and the other organs. The nerves, brain, and intellect make up the psychological body. To practise asanas correctly, you have to learn to bring all these levels together.

STAGES OF LEARNING YOGA

Newcomers to yoga approach asanas with "uncultured" minds. They have to learn that at first asanas are practised at the level of the anatomical body alone – the stage called *arambhavastha*. This beginner's stage is important and should not be hurried through. In order to learn the asanas, beginners should be primarily concerned with getting their movements right. In the step-by-step instructions to the asanas in this chapter, I have highlighted the points you should concentrate on, the important motions and movements in the pose you need to take note of. Beginners have to grasp the whole asana, and not lose themselves in the finer details. It is more important for you to start by striving for stability within a pose. This provides a strong foundation. You will then enter the intermediate stage, or *ghatavastha*, in which the mind is affected by changes in the body. When you reach this stage, you are practising the movements correctly, your body is under



INTEGRATING BODY AND SPIRIT
Yogacharya Iyengar in
Adhomukha Svanasana

“Asanas keep your body, as well as your mind, healthy and active.”

your control, but you must now push your mind to touch every part of your body. In my instructions to the asanas in this chapter, I have pointed out that students of yoga at this stage must practise the asanas with reflective and meditative attention. You must become aware of your tissues, organs, skin, and even individual cells. Your mind must flow along with all of these parts.

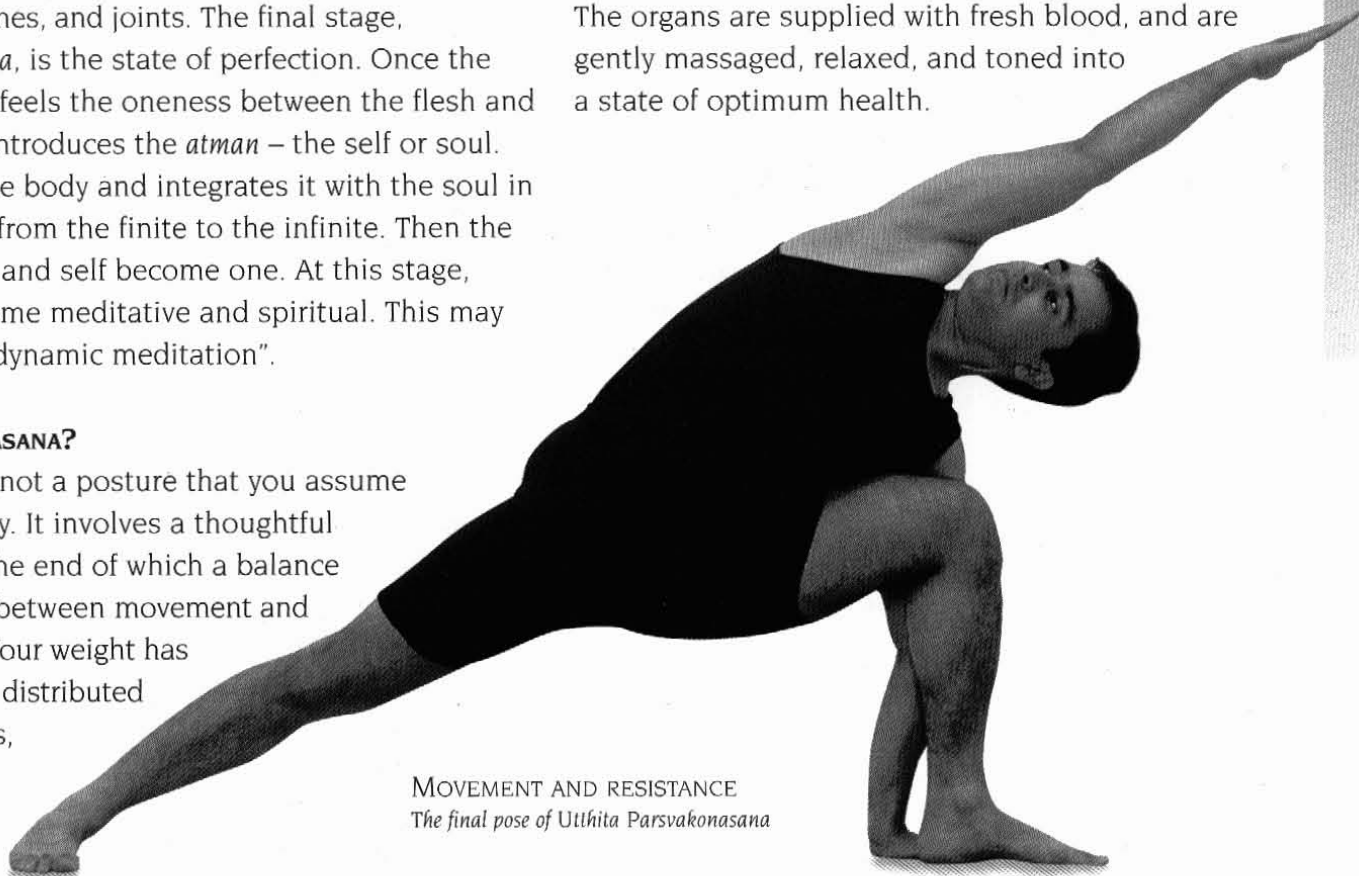
Parichayavastha, or the advanced stage, comes next. This is the stage of intimate knowledge, when your mind brings your body in touch with your intelligence. Once this happens, the mind ceases to be a separate entity, and the intelligence and the body become one. I have included the concepts that the advanced practitioner of yoga should focus on. Your adjustments are more subtle and discriminating now, and are in the realm of the mental and physiological body, rather than merely in your muscles, bones, and joints. The final stage, *nispattyavastha*, is the state of perfection. Once the intelligence feels the oneness between the flesh and the skin, it introduces the *atman* – the self or soul. This frees the body and integrates it with the soul in the journey from the finite to the infinite. Then the body, mind, and self become one. At this stage, asanas become meditative and spiritual. This may be termed “dynamic meditation”.

WHAT IS AN ASANA?

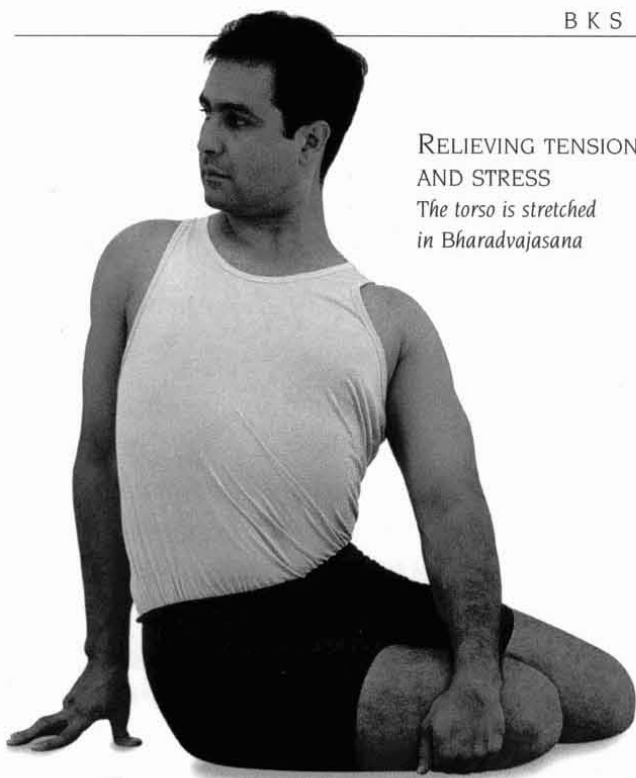
An asana is not a posture that you assume mechanically. It involves a thoughtful process at the end of which a balance is achieved between movement and resistance. Your weight has to be evenly distributed over muscles, bones, and

joints, just as your intelligence must be engaged at every level. You have to create space in your muscles and your skin, fitting the fine network of your entire body into the asana. This helps the organs of perception (the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin) to discern the subtlety of each movement. This conjunction between the organs of action and organs of perception occurs when the student reaches a subjective understanding of an asana, and begins, through instinct as well as knowledge, to adjust his or her movements correctly. Practise with dedication. Be completely absorbed by the asana.

Once both sides of the body become symmetrical, undue stress is removed from the circulatory, respiratory, digestive, reproductive, and excretory systems. In each asana, different organs are placed in different anatomical positions, and are squeezed and spread, dampened and dried, heated and cooled. The organs are supplied with fresh blood, and are gently massaged, relaxed, and toned into a state of optimum health.



MOVEMENT AND RESISTANCE
The final pose of Utthita Parsvakonasana



RELIEVING TENSION
AND STRESS
*The torso is stretched
in Bharadvajasana*

SITTING ASANAS

All sitting asanas bring elasticity to the hips, knees, ankles, and muscles of the groin. These poses remove tension and hardness in the diaphragm and throat, making breathing smoother and easier. They keep the spine steady, pacifying the mind and stretching the muscles of the heart. Blood circulation increases to all parts of the body.

STANDING ASANAS

Standing asanas strengthen the leg muscles and joints, and increase the suppleness and strength of the spine. Owing to their rotational and flexing movements, the spinal muscles and inter-vertebral joints are kept mobile and well-aligned. The arteries of the legs are stretched, increasing the blood supply to the lower limbs, and preventing thrombosis in the calf muscles. These asanas also tone the cardio-vascular system. The lateral wall of the heart is fully stretched, increasing the supply of fresh blood to the heart.

FORWARD BENDS

In forward bends, the abdominal organs are compressed. This has a unique effect on the nervous system: as these organs relax, the frontal brain is cooled, and the flow of blood to the entire brain is regulated. The sympathetic nervous

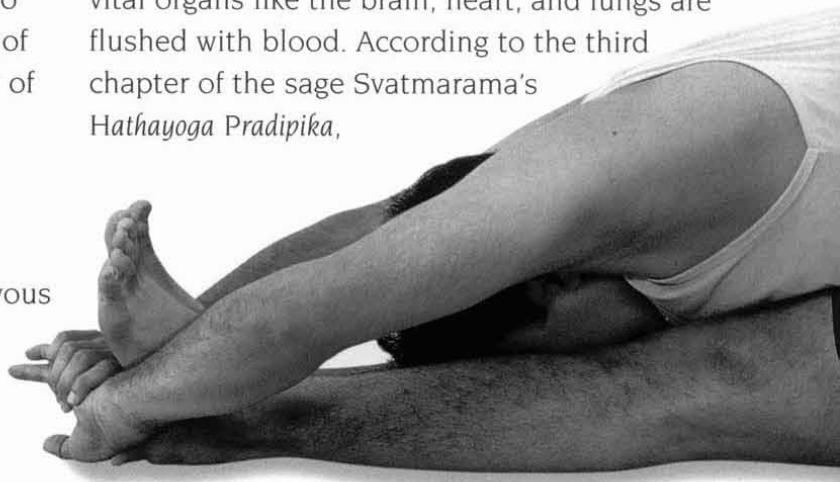
system is rested, bringing down the pulse rate and blood pressure. Stress is removed from the organs of perception and the senses relax. The adrenal glands are also soothed and function more efficiently. Since the body is in a horizontal position in forward bends, the heart is relieved of the strain of pumping blood against gravity, and blood circulates through all parts of the body easily. Forward bends also strengthen the paraspinal muscles, inter-vertebral joints, and ligaments.

TWISTS

These asanas teach us the importance of a healthy spine and inner body. In twists, the pelvic and abdominal organs are squeezed and flushed with blood. They improve the suppleness of the diaphragm, and relieve spinal, hip, and groin disorders. The spine also becomes more supple, and this improves the flow of blood to the spinal nerves and increases energy levels.

INVERSIONS

Some people fear that if they practise inverted poses, their blood pressure will rise, or their blood vessels burst. These are complete misconceptions. After all, standing for long periods can lead to thrombosis and varicose veins, but no one is going to stop standing up! Standing upright is a result of evolution. Just as the human body has adjusted to an upright position, it can also learn to perform inversions without any risk or harm. In contrast to the twisting asanas, inverted asanas have a drying effect on the pelvic and abdominal organs, while vital organs like the brain, heart, and lungs are flushed with blood. According to the third chapter of the sage Svatmarama's *Hathayoga Pradipika*,



Salamba Sirsasana (headstand, *see page 118*) is the king of asanas, and Salamba Sarvangasana (shoulderstand, *see page 124*) the queen of asanas. The health of your body and mind is greatly enhanced by the practice of these two asanas.

BACK BENDS

All back bends stimulate the central nervous system and increase its ability to bear stress. They help to relieve and prevent headaches, hypertension, and nervous exhaustion. These asanas stimulate and energize the body, and are invaluable to people suffering from depression. In Urdhva Dhanurasana (*see page 140*) and Viparita Dandasana (*see page 220*), the liver and spleen are fully stretched, and can therefore function more effectively.

RECLINING ASANAS

Reclining asanas are restful poses which soothe the body and refresh the mind. While reclining asanas are often sequenced at the end of a yoga session, they are also preparatory asanas, as they help relax the body and strengthen the joints. They give the body the required energy for the more strenuous asanas. Savasana (*see page 150*), for instance, helps to recover the breath and cool the body and the mind. Reclining asanas prepare you for pranayama.

PRACTISING CLASSIC POSES

Read the instructions for practice (*see page 386*). Practise classic poses when you feel confident of the suppleness of your body and the stability of your mind. In the 20-Week Yoga Course (*see page 388*), I recommend that beginners and those with stiff muscles or joints, or people with specific ailments, might prefer to practise with props for the first 6-8 months. If you normally practise classic poses without props, you may, however, wish to use them on days when you are feeling tired, or if a

particular part of your body feels stiff. Always sequence your asanas with care. Beginners should follow the order given in the 20-Week Yoga Course. Whenever you practise, take care not to "harden" your brain. This occurs when you hold your breath, and your head becomes tense and heavy, particularly common when practising standing asanas and forward bends. This can also happen in a standing asana when you use force to descend without fully extending your spine. Since the action is achieved by force, rather than by utilizing the intelligence of the spine, this results in tension in the spine. I call this situation "hardening the brain" because it means you are not allowing your brain to be sufficiently sensitive to your body's actions. Similarly, in back bends, if force, not intelligence is applied while extending the back, the cervical region remains hard. This, too, "hardens the brain".

"BRAIN" OF THE POSE

In each asana, a specific part of your body is the "brain" of the pose. For instance, the outstretched arm is the "brain" of Utthita

Parsvakonasana

(*see page 60*), the

centre of balance

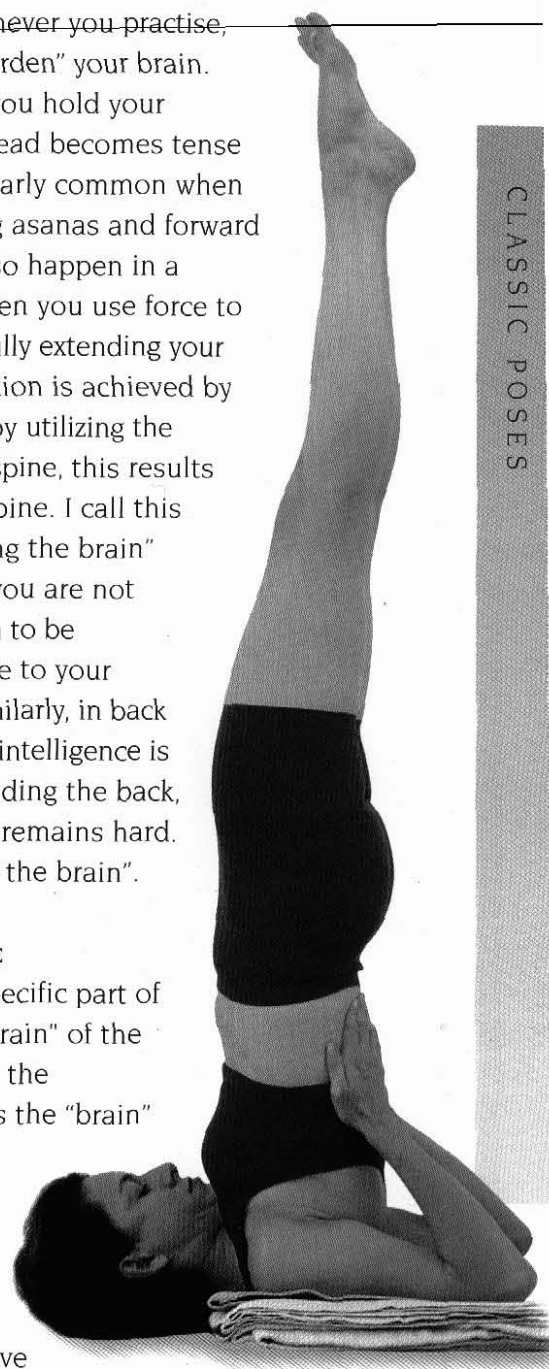
in the pose. When

you practise, observe

this specific part of your body carefully and focus on it. Bring a firmness

and steadiness to it. This will then spread to the rest of your body and bring it under your control.

Gradually, you will be able to experience the pose at the physiological, and not merely the physical level.



CLASSIC POSES

STRETCHING OUT

Paschimottanasana extends the spine

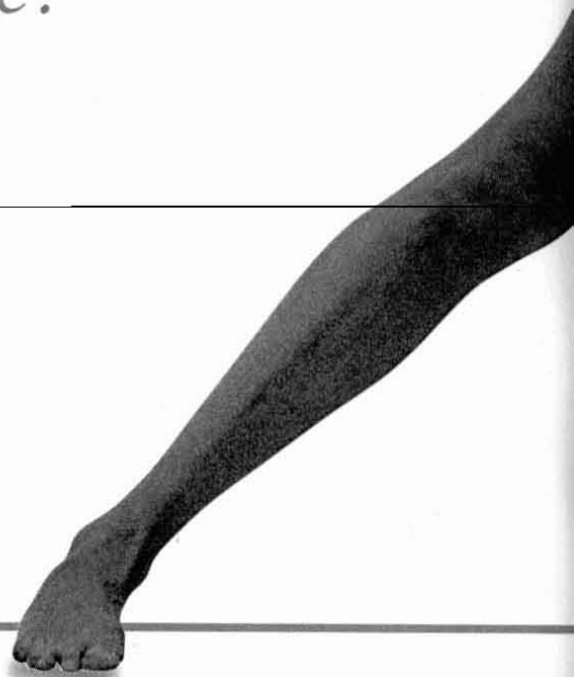
PRACTICE WITHOUT FEAR

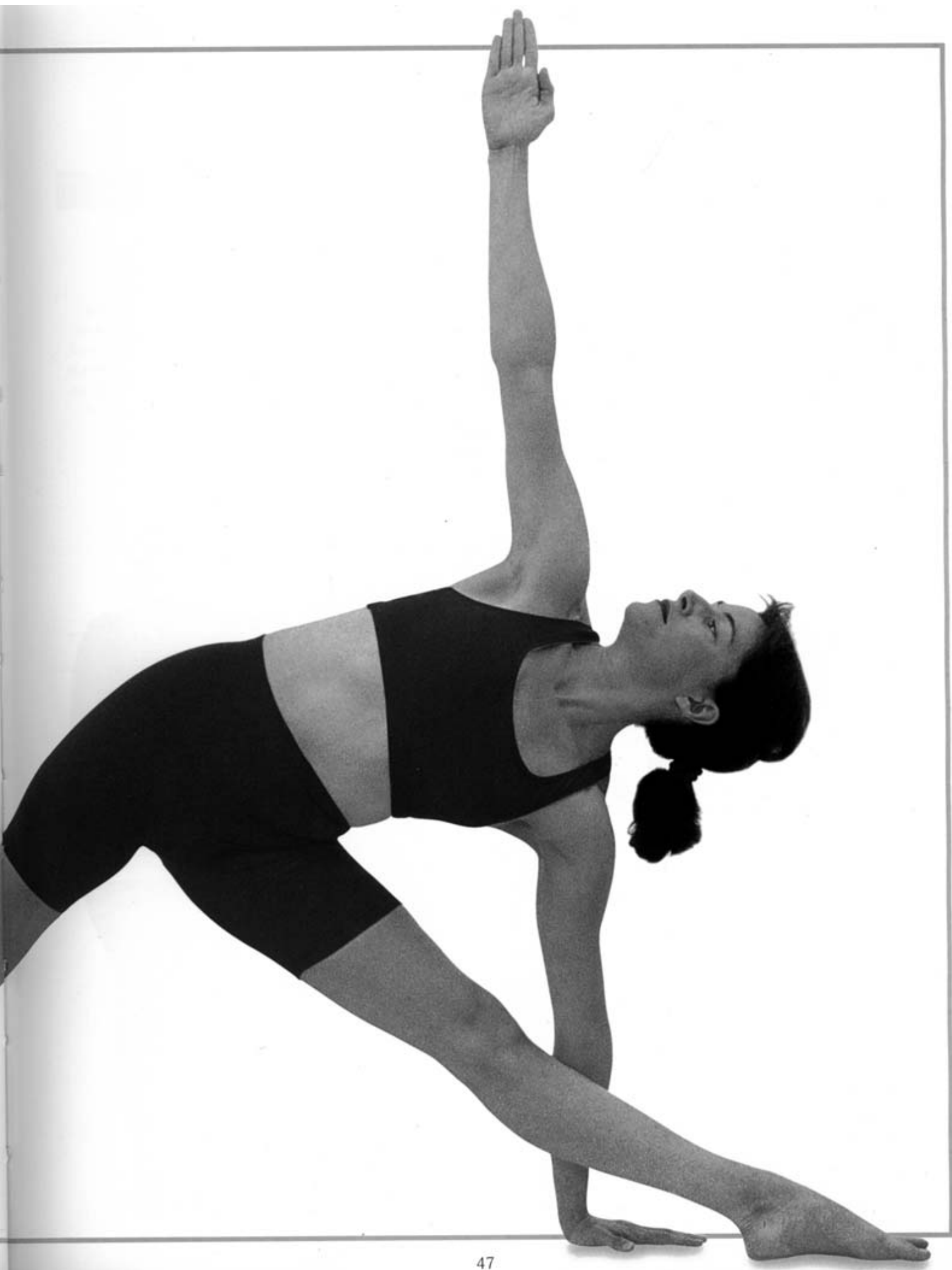
Inversions, like Salamba Sarvangasana, are good for your body and mind

Standing Asanas

*“An asana is not a posture which
you assume mechanically.*

*It involves thought, at the end
of which a balance is achieved
between movement
and resistance.”*





ताडासन Tadasana

- Mountain pose -



IN THIS POSTURE you learn to stand as firm and erect as a mountain. The word *tada* in Sanskrit means "mountain". Most people do not balance perfectly on both legs, leading to ailments which can be avoided. Tadasana teaches you the art of standing correctly and increases your awareness of your body. It is the foundation stone for other asanas. Practising it gives rise to a sense of firmness, strength, stillness, and steadiness.

CAUTIONS

If you have Parkinson's disease or a spinal disc disorder, you may find it helpful to stand facing a wall with your palms placed on it. People with scoliosis should rest the spine against the protruding edge of two adjoining walls.

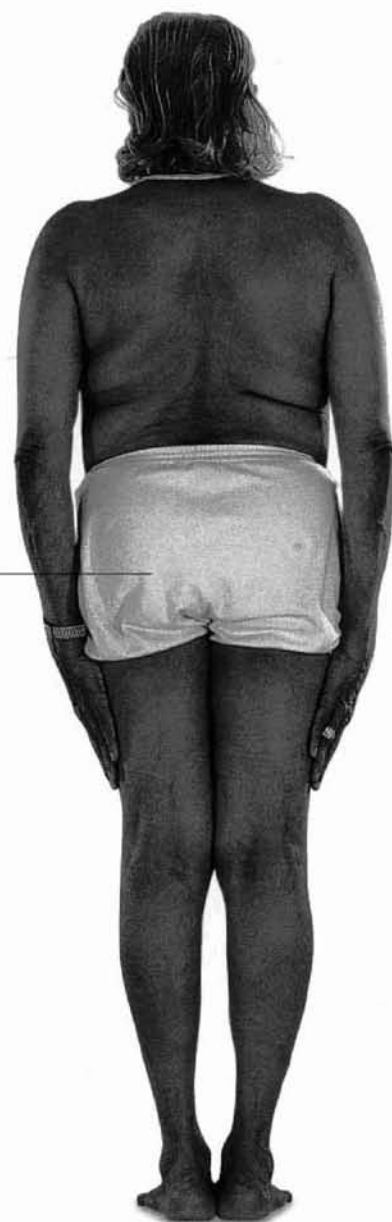
KEEP THE HEAD, NECK, AND
SPINE IN A STRAIGHT LINE

1 Stand with your feet together on a smooth, uncovered floor. Make sure that your feet are in line with each other, with both the big toes and heels touching. If you find it difficult to keep your feet together, separate them by about 7cm (2-3in). Rest your weight on the centres of the arches of the feet, not on the heels or toes. Stretch out your toes and keep them relaxed.

2 Press your feet firmly down on the floor and stretch both your legs upward. Keep both ankles in line with each other. Your legs should be perpendicular to the floor and aligned to each other. Tighten your kneecaps and quadriceps and pull them upward. Draw your hips inward by compressing them as well as your buttocks.



TIGHTEN YOUR
BUTTOCKS



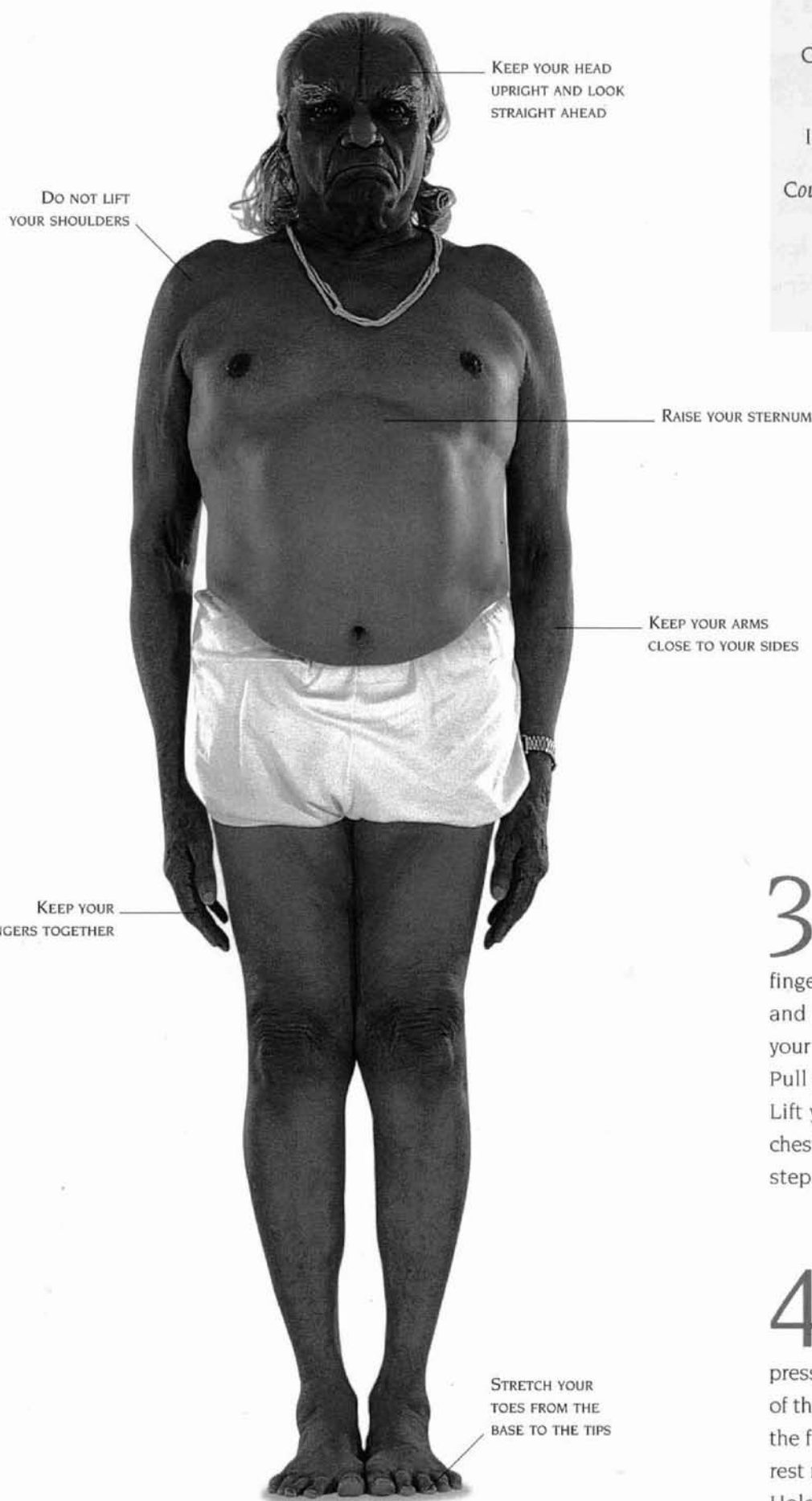
BENEFITS

◆
Corrects bad posture by straightening the spine

◆
Improves the alignment of your body

◆
Counters the degenerative effects of ageing on the spine, legs, and feet

◆
Tones the buttock muscles



3 Extend your arms along the sides of your body, with your palms facing your thighs and fingers pointing down. Keep the head and spine in a straight line. Stretch your neck without tensing the muscles. Pull your lower abdomen in and up. Lift your sternum and broaden your chest. Breathe normally during all the steps of the asana.

4 Press your heels, as well as the mounds of your toes down on the floor. This will place equal pressure on the outer and inner edges of the feet. Guard against balancing on the front of the feet. Now, consciously rest most of your weight on your heels. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds.

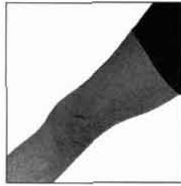
3 Turn your right foot in slightly to the left, maintaining the stretch of your other leg. Then, turn your left foot 90° to the left, keeping the right leg stretched and tightened at the knee. Make sure that your arms do not waver. Keep them fully stretched.

BEGINNERS To maintain your balance during this step, always keep to the sequence of turning in your right foot first. Once you have done this, turn your left foot out.

INTERMEDIATES For a better stretch in the final pose, press your left heel down on the floor and raise your toes toward the ceiling (see inset). Then tighten the left knee and flatten your foot to the floor again.



CORRECTING YOURSELF



THE RIGHT KNEE

WRONG If your right knee rotates to the right, this will impair your stretch in the final pose.

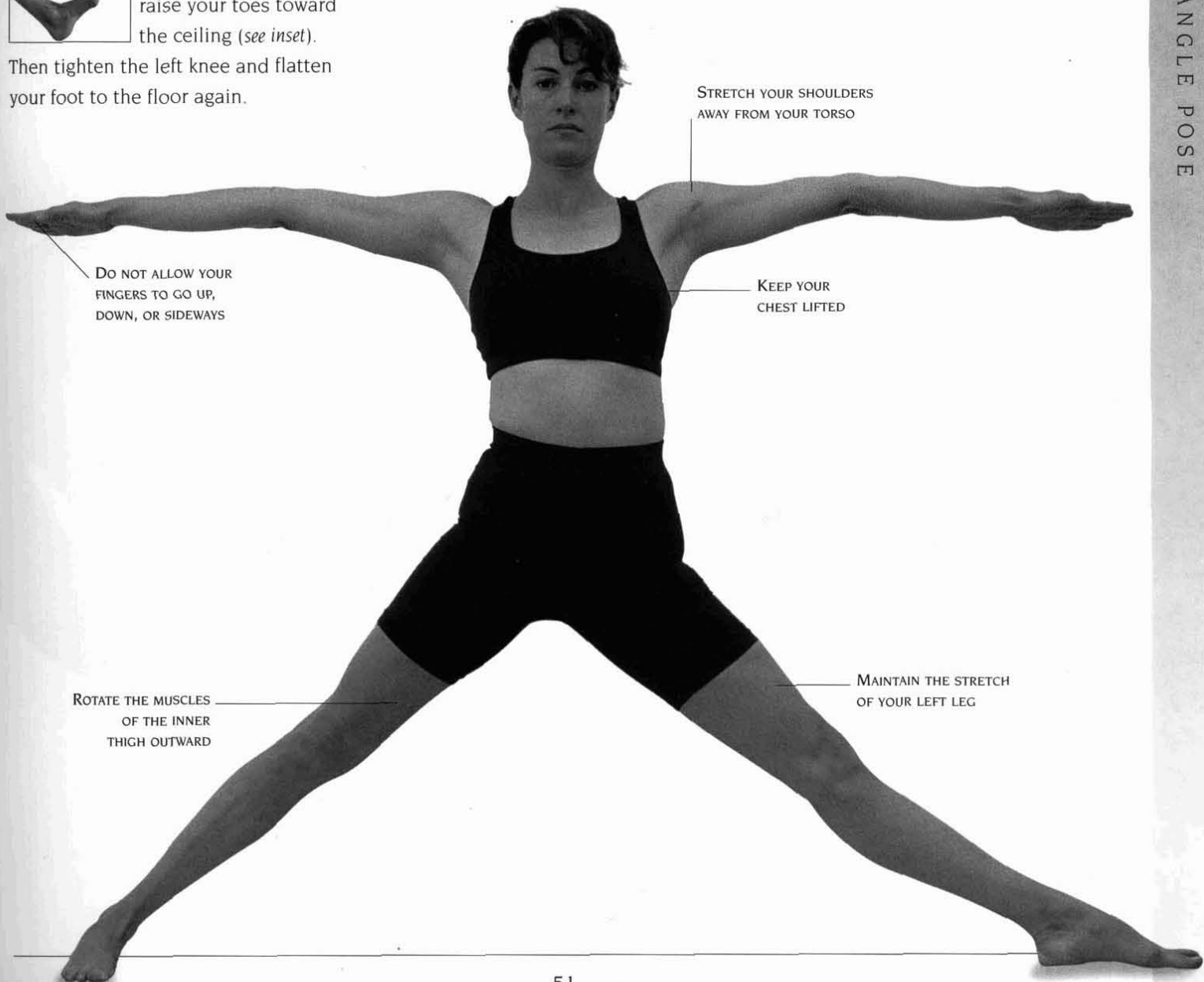
RIGHT Keep your right kneecap facing front. Ensure that your right thigh does not turn inward.



THE LEFT KNEE

WRONG If the left knee rotates too far to the left, your balance in the final pose will be affected.

RIGHT Keep your left knee tightened, and in line with the centre of your left foot, shin, and thigh.



3 Turn your right foot in slightly to the left, maintaining the stretch of your other leg. Then, turn your left foot 90° to the left, keeping the right leg stretched and tightened at the knee. Make sure that your arms do not waver. Keep them fully stretched.

BEGINNERS To maintain your balance during this step, always keep to the sequence of turning in your right foot first. Once you have done this, turn your left foot out.

INTERMEDIATES For a better stretch in the final pose, press your left heel down on the floor and raise your toes toward the ceiling (see inset). Then tighten the left knee and flatten your foot to the floor again.



CORRECTING YOURSELF



THE RIGHT KNEE

WRONG If your right knee rotates to the right, this will impair your stretch in the final pose.

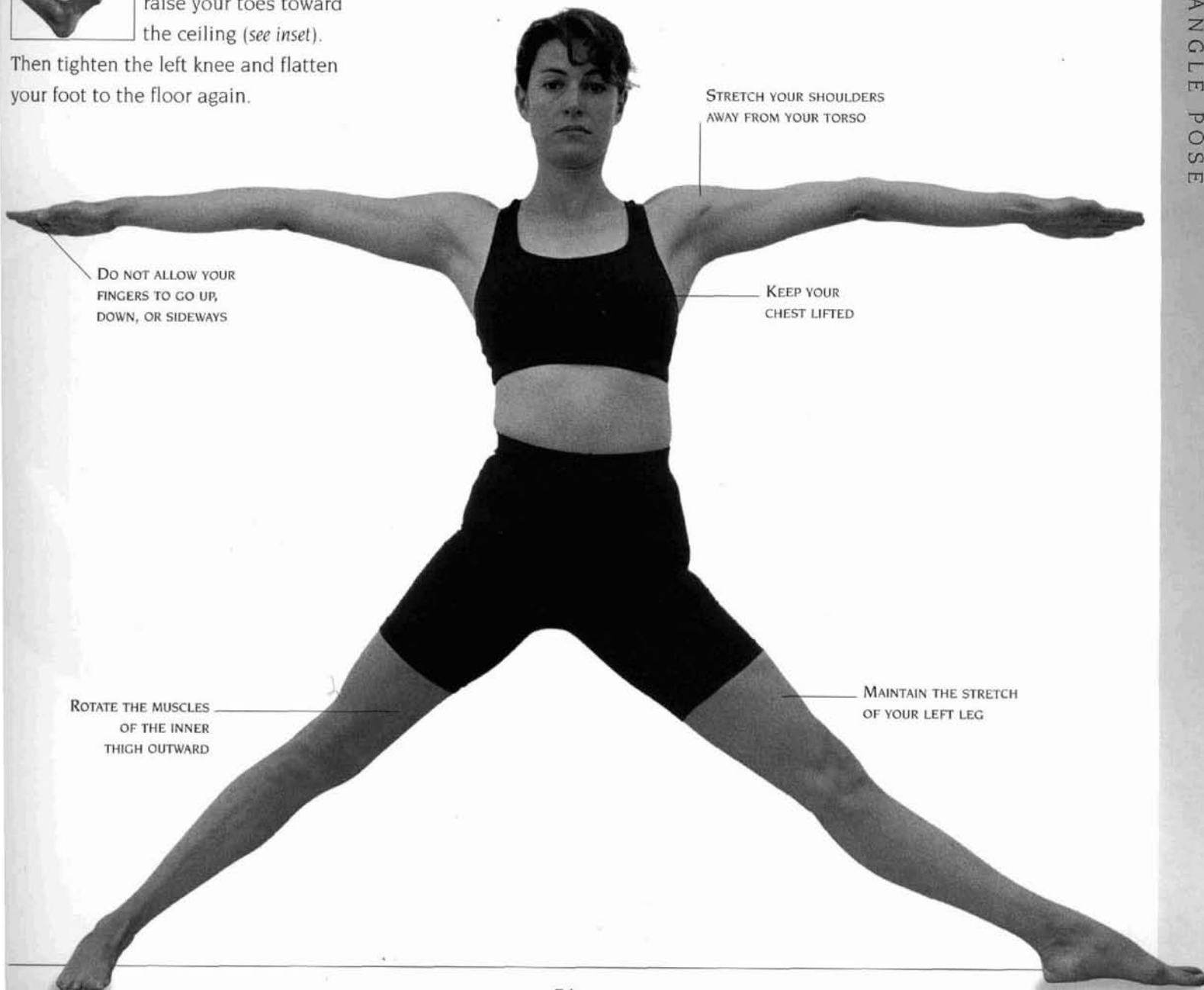
RIGHT Keep your right kneecap facing front. Ensure that your right thigh does not turn inward.



THE LEFT KNEE

WRONG If the left knee rotates too far to the left, your balance in the final pose will be affected.

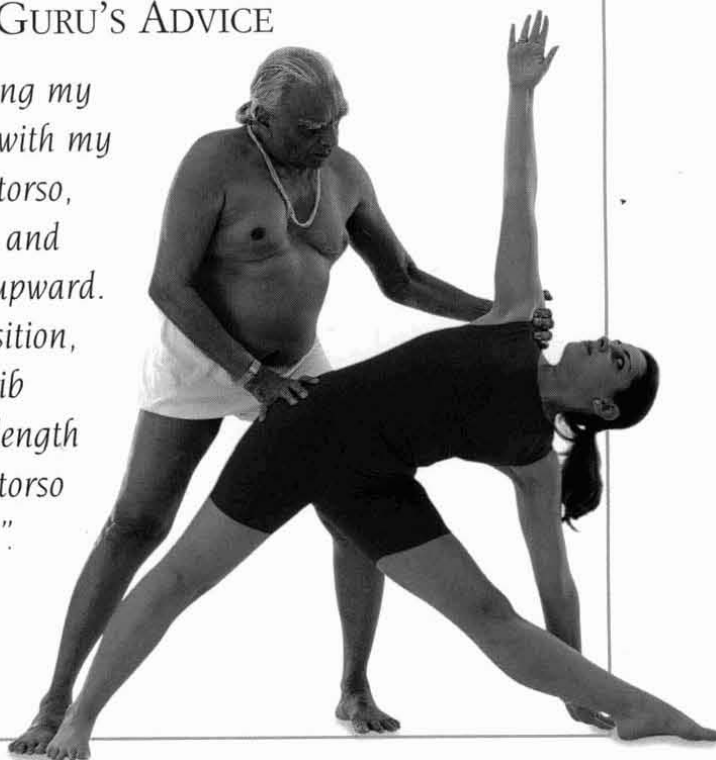
RIGHT Keep your left knee tightened, and in line with the centre of your left foot, shin, and thigh.



Utthita Trikonasana

THE GURU'S ADVICE

"Look at how I am moving my student's left buttock in with my knee. To help rotate her torso, I grip her right shoulder and slowly revolve her torso upward. Once you are in this position, move your left floating rib forward and extend the length of the right side of your torso toward the right armpit."



CORRECTING YOURSELF



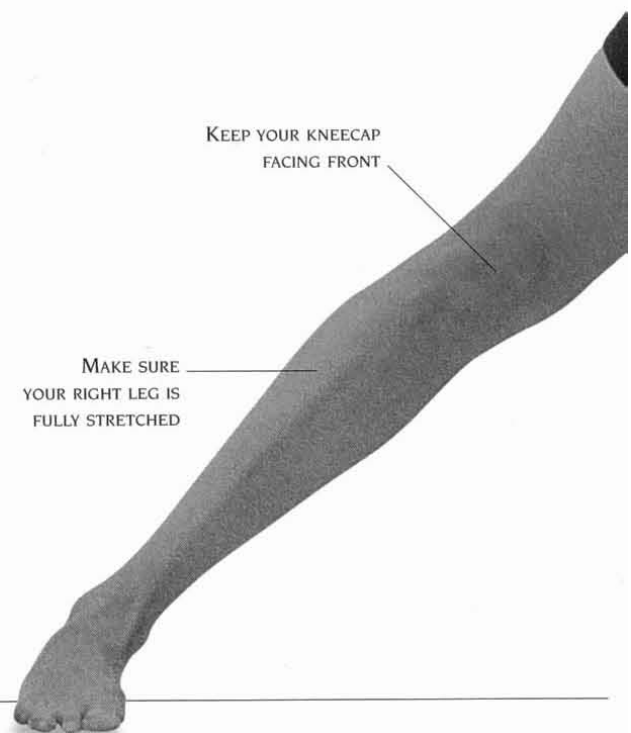
WRONG If your right arm tilts back, you will lose the correct alignment of the hips and buttocks. Your neck and head will jut forward and your weight will fall on your left palm, and not on your left heel.



RIGHT The right arm is stretched straight upward from the armpit and kept steady. Keep the back of your head aligned to your spine, and keep your shoulder blades in line with each other.

KEEP YOUR KNEECAP
FACING FRONT

MAKE SURE
YOUR RIGHT LEG IS
FULLY STRETCHED



4 Exhale, and bend your torso sideways to the left. Place your left palm flat on the floor, and press your left heel down on the floor. Adjust your pose until your weight rests on your left heel and not on your left palm. Raise your right arm up toward the ceiling, in line with your shoulders and left arm. Turn your head, keeping your neck passive, and fix your eyes on your right thumb. Stay in the pose for 20-30 seconds. Do not take deep breaths, but breathe evenly.

BEGINNERS When you bend, first grip your left ankle with your left hand. Bring the left buttock forward slightly. Place your right hand on your right hip. Once you feel steady in this pose, follow the instructions above.

KEEP YOUR RIGHT
PALM OPEN AND
FULLY STRETCHED

BENEFITS

Relieves gastritis, indigestion,
acidity, and flatulence

Improves the flexibility of the spine

Alleviates backache

Corrects alignment
of the shoulders

Helps to treat neck sprains

Massages and tones the pelvic area

Strengthens the ankles

Reduces discomfort
during menstruation

LOOK AT YOUR
RIGHT THUMB

KEEP YOUR LEFT
SHOULDER STRAIGHT

DO NOT LET THE LEFT
THIGH TURN INWARD

PRESS THE INNER EDGE
OF YOUR LEFT HEEL
DOWN ON THE FLOOR

Utthita Trikonasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

Keep your right arm steady, as it is the “brain” of the pose (see page 45). Work on your back. Imagine your body is being pulled in opposite directions from the spine. Check that both shoulders are equally stretched out. Make sure that your torso revolves slightly upward and back. Keep the back of your neck in line with your spine – but relax your throat, keeping the muscles of your neck passive. Ensure that your tailbone and the back of your head align with each other, and that your whole body is balanced symmetrically in one plane.

KEEP YOUR LEFT
LEG ACTIVE, FIRM,
AND STABLE

DO NOT LET YOUR
ARM WAVER

TAKE YOUR SHOULDERS BACK
AND TUCK IN THE SHOULDER
BLADES AND BACK RIBS

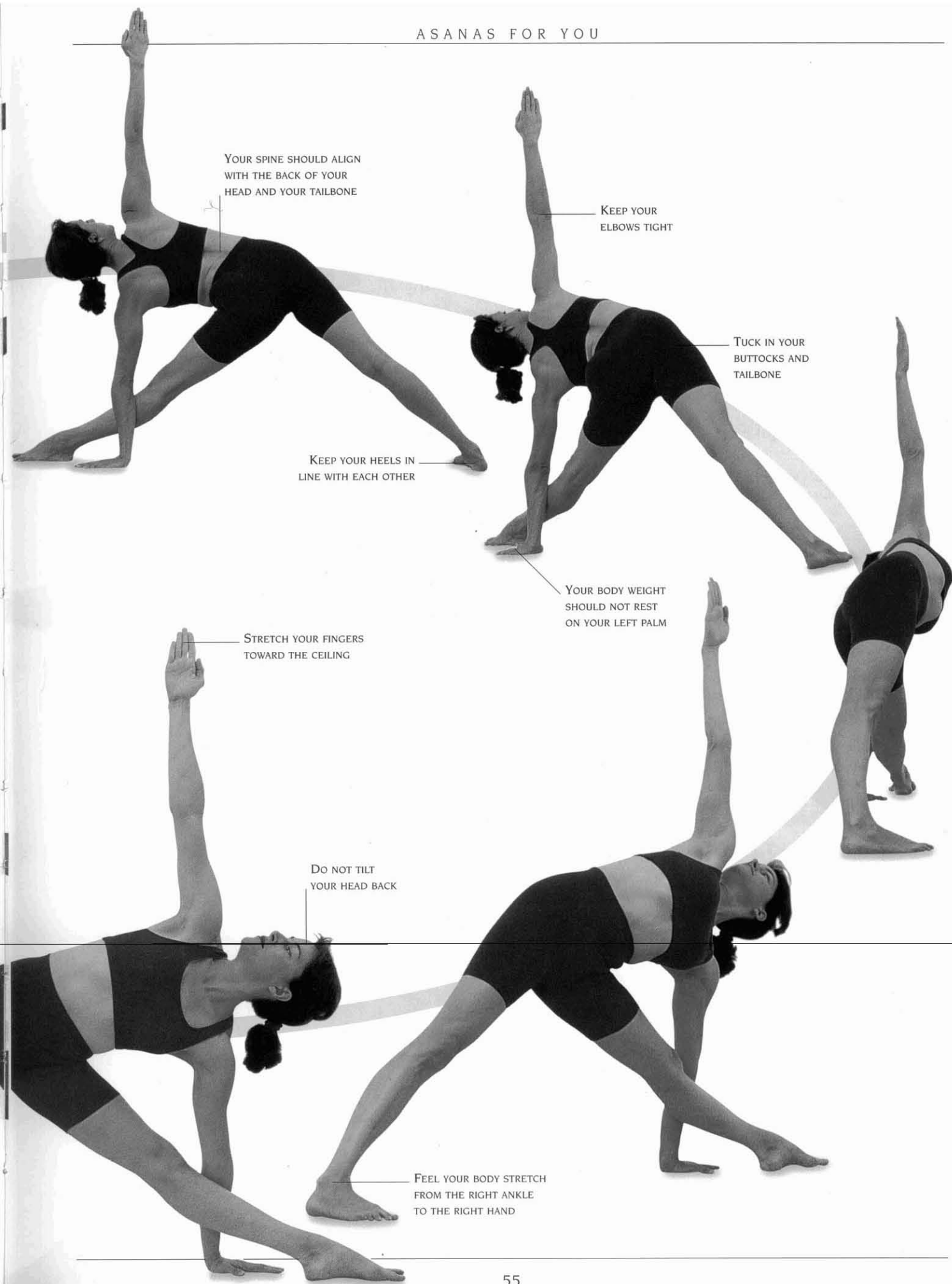
KEEP THE BACK OF
YOUR RIGHT LEG FIRM

FIX YOUR GAZE ON
YOUR RIGHT THUMB

EXTEND YOUR
SHIN UPWARD

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Inhale, and lift your left palm from the floor. Stretch your right arm out to the side and straighten your torso gradually. Bring your arms down to your sides. Turn your feet to face forward. Repeat the pose on the other side. Then exhale, and come back to Tadasana.



Virabhadrasana 2

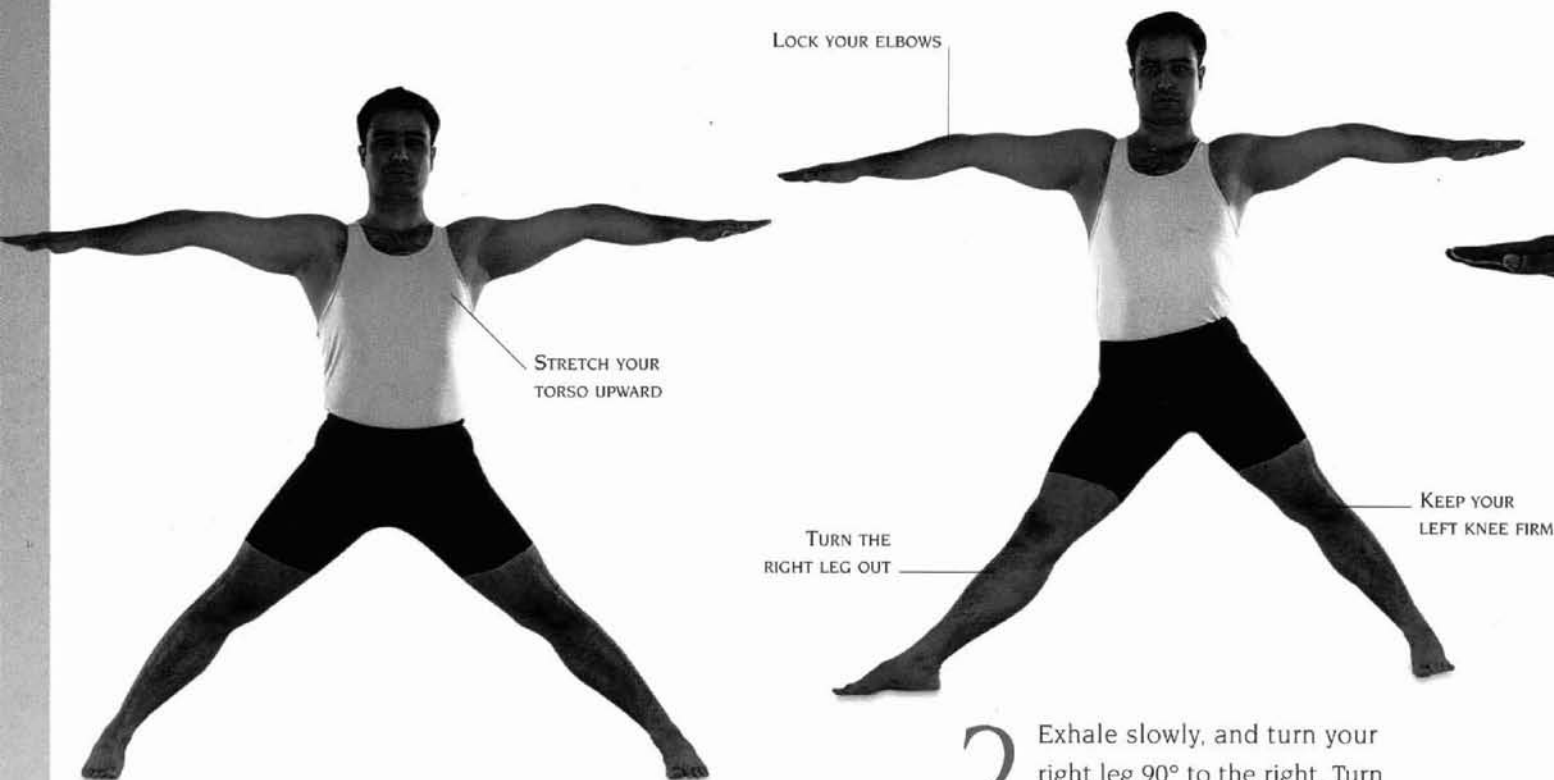
- Warrior pose 2 -



THIS POSE IS NAMED after Virabhadra, a legendary warrior. His story is told by the famous Sanskrit playwright, Kalidasa, in the epic, *Kumarasambhava*. Regular practice of this asana helps to develop your strength and endurance. The steps exercise your limbs and torso vigorously, reducing stiffness in your neck and shoulders. It also makes your knee and hip joints more flexible.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise if you have a cardiac condition, palpitations, heartburn, diarrhoea, or dysentery. Women with menorrhagia and metrorrhagia should avoid this asana.



1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48) and inhale deeply. Jump, landing with your feet approximately 1.2m (4ft) apart. Your toes should point forward.



Raise your arms out to the sides, in line with your shoulders (see inset). Your palms should face the floor

and be in line with each other. Keep your fingers straight and stretched out. Press the little toe of each foot down on the floor. Consciously pull the inner sides of your legs up toward your waist.

2 Exhale slowly, and turn your right leg 90° to the right. Turn in your left foot slightly to the right. Ensure that your body weight is resting on your right heel and not on your toes. Keep your left leg stretched out and taut at the knee. To prevent this leg from slipping, make sure that your weight falls on the last two toes.

BEGINNERS Focus on turning the right thigh out correctly. The thigh should turn at the same time – and to the same extent – as your right foot.

3 Exhale, and bend your right knee. Ensure that your right thigh is parallel to the floor. Keep the shin perpendicular to the floor, in line with your right heel. Pull the muscles of your right calf upward. Turn your head to the right. Stretch the arches and toes of both feet. Hold the pose for 30 seconds. Breathe evenly.

INTERMEDIATES Bend your right knee from the buttock bone and consciously push the flesh and skin of the thigh toward the knee. Stretch your arms out fully. Imagine they are being pulled apart in a tug-of-war.

KEEP YOUR
BRAIN PASSIVE

BENEFITS

Improves breathing capacity
by expanding the chest

Helps in the treatment
of a prolapsed or slipped disc

Alleviates the condition of a broken,
fused, or deviated tailbone

Reduces fat around the hips

Relieves lower backache

STRETCH YOUR ARMS
AWAY FROM YOUR
SHOULDERS

EXPAND YOUR CHEST

THE RIGHT KNEE SHOULD
BE POSITIONED ABOVE
THE RIGHT HEEL

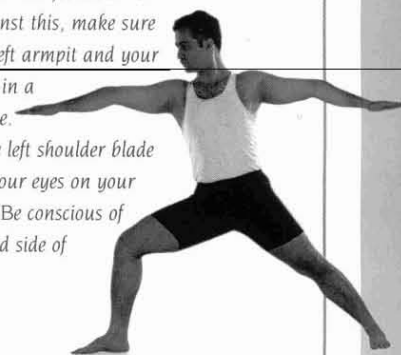
TIGHTEN THE MUSCLES
OF YOUR THIGHS

PRESS DOWN ON
YOUR RIGHT HEEL

CORRECTING YOURSELF

Do not allow the torso to either move right or tilt forward. To guard against this, make sure that your left armpit and your left hip are in a straight line.

Tuck in the left shoulder blade and keep your eyes on your right arm. Be conscious of the stretched side of your body.



Virabhadrasana 2

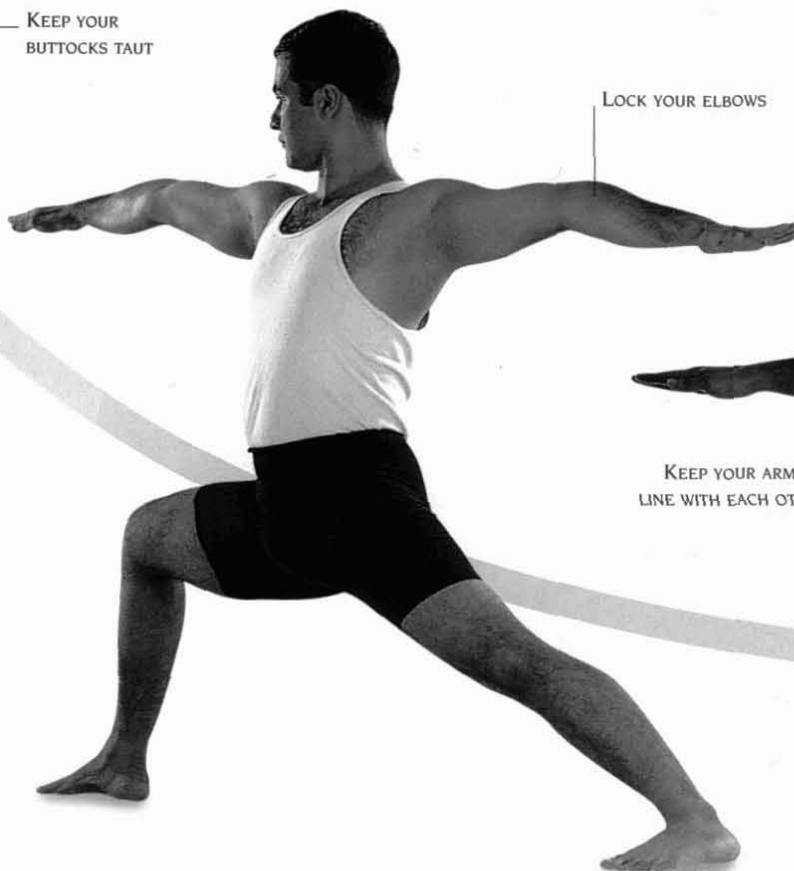
ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

Do not bend your knee too rigidly and keep your bent leg relaxed. Consciously keep your brain passive. Your right buttock should be slightly lower than the right inner knee. Tighten your buttocks and broaden the hips. Press the outer edges of both your feet down on the floor. Feel the energy rise from the ankle to the knee. Push your chest out and expand your chest cavity to its full extent. Keep the left knee taut and lifted upward. If it drops, your chest will cave in. Maintain the stretch of your arms and shoulder blades away from your torso.



KEEP YOUR TOES
SEPARATED AND ACTIVE

KEEP YOUR
BUTTOCKS TAUT

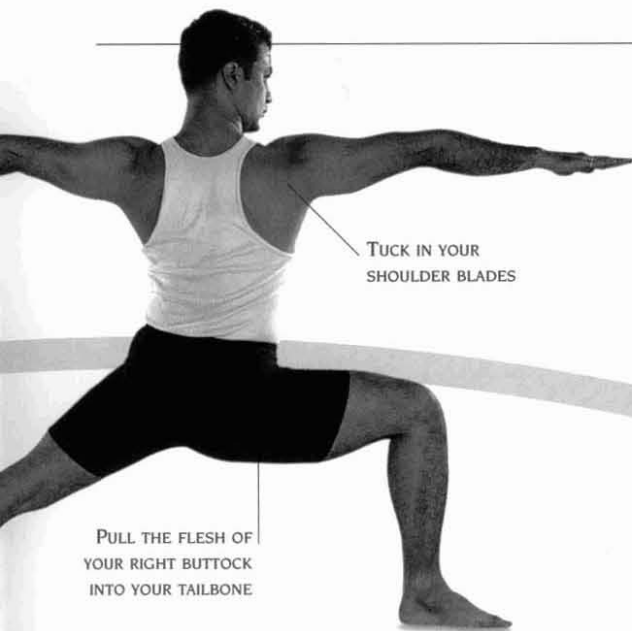


LOCK YOUR ELBOWS

KEEP YOUR ARMS IN
LINE WITH EACH OTHER

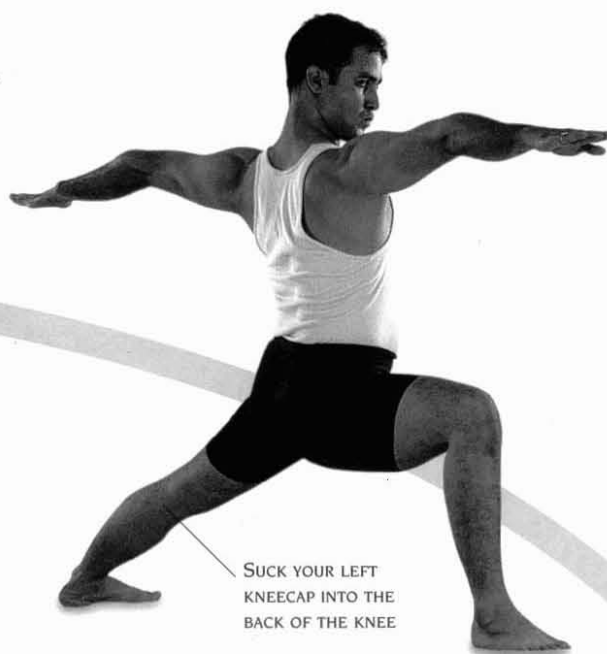
COMING OUT OF THE POSE

◆
Inhale, and straighten your right leg. Turn your feet, so that they face forward. Repeat this pose on the other side. Then exhale, and jump back to Tadasana.



TUCK IN YOUR
SHOULDER BLADES

PULL THE FLESH OF
YOUR RIGHT BUTTOCK
INTO YOUR TAILBONE

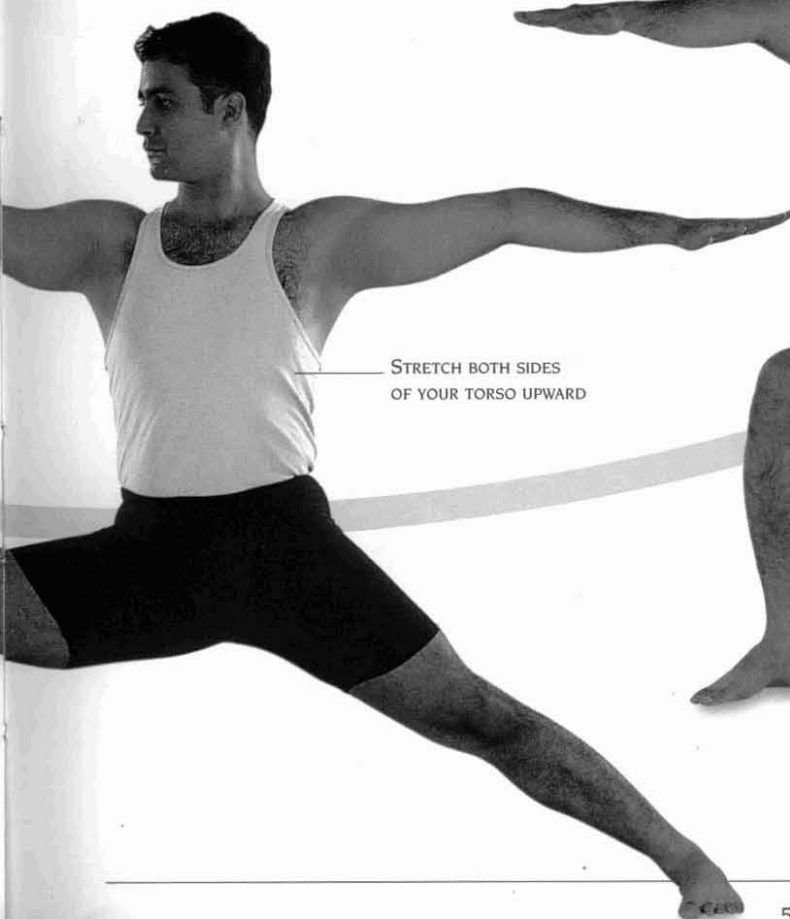


SUCK YOUR LEFT
KNEECAP INTO THE
BACK OF THE KNEE

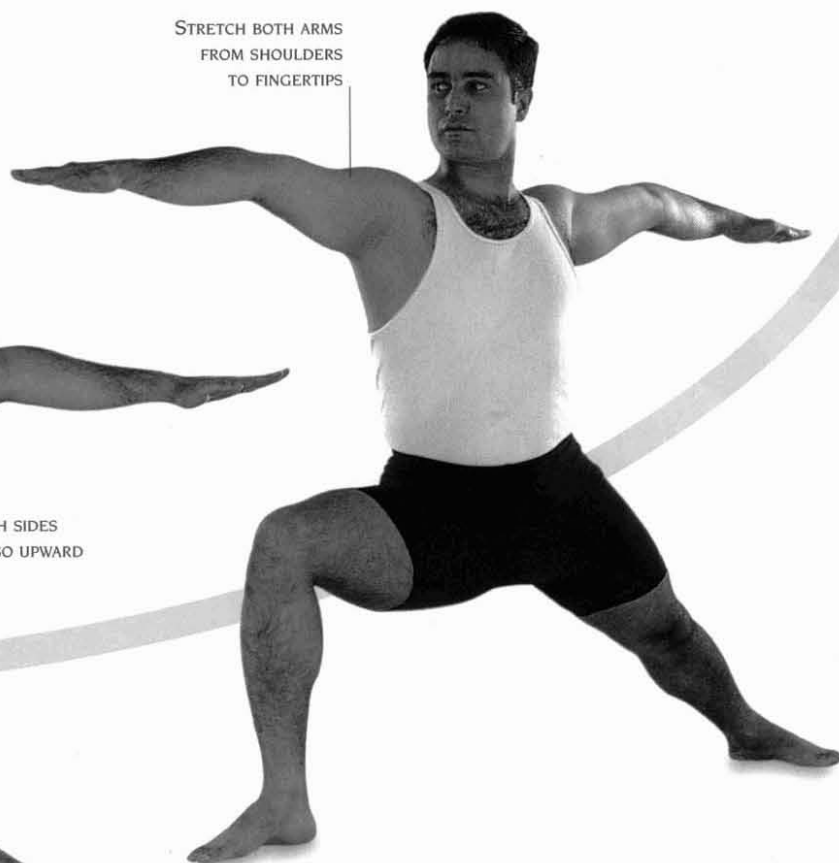
DO NOT ALLOW THE
TORSO TO MOVE
TO THE RIGHT



STRETCH BOTH ARMS
FROM SHOULDERS
TO FINGERTIPS



STRETCH BOTH SIDES
OF YOUR TORSO UPWARD



उत्थित पार्श्वकोणासन

Utthita Parsvakonasana

- Extended side stretch -

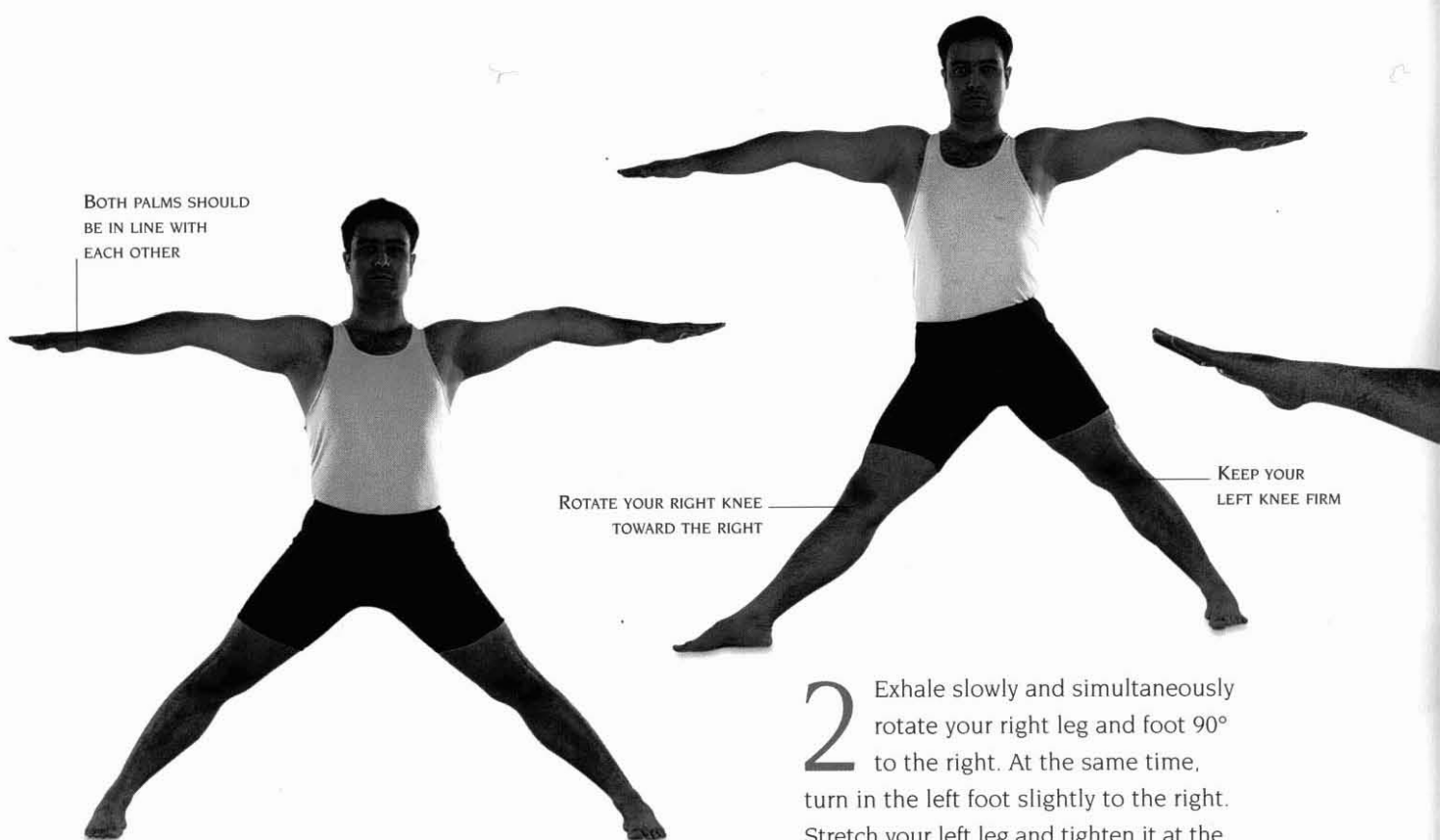


IN SANSKRIT, *utthita* means “stretch”, *parsva* indicates “side” or “flank”, while *kona* translates as “angle”.

In this asana, both sides of your body are stretched intensely, from the toes of one foot to the fingertips of the opposite hand. Remember to keep your body absolutely steady when practising this asana.

CAUTIONS

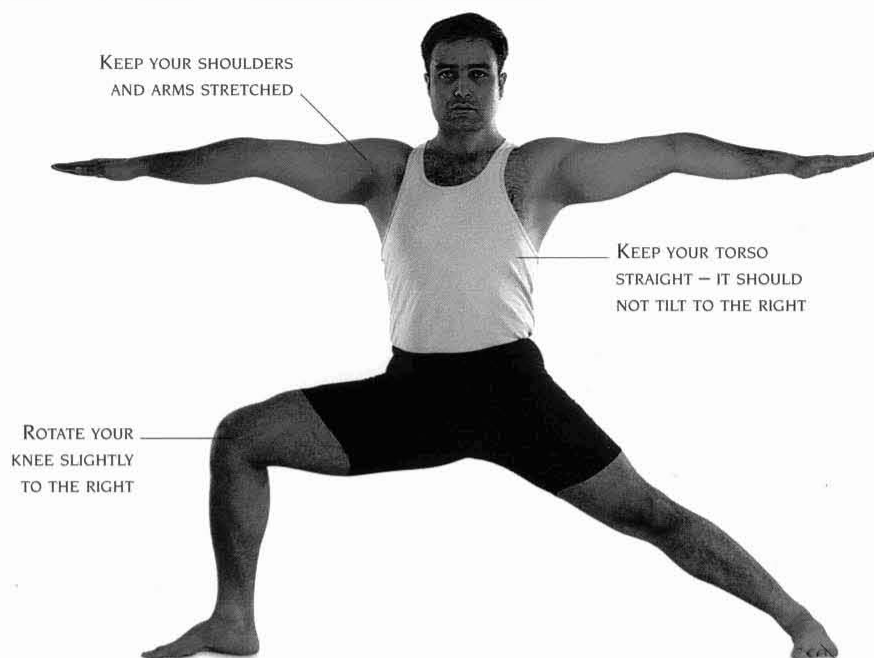
If you have high blood pressure, avoid this asana. If you have cervical spondylosis, do not turn your neck or look up.



1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48). Inhale, and jump your feet about 1.2m (4ft) apart. At the same time, raise both your arms out to the sides, to shoulder-level. Your palms should face the floor. Stretch your arms from the back of the elbows. Ensure that your feet are in line with each other, toes pointing forward. Push down on the outer edges of your feet. Press the little toe of each foot down to the floor.

2 Exhale slowly and simultaneously rotate your right leg and foot 90° to the right. At the same time, turn in the left foot slightly to the right. Stretch your left leg and tighten it at the knee. Ensure that your weight falls on the heel, not the toes, of your right foot. Adjust the distance between your legs, if necessary. Make sure your feet remain in line with each other.

BEGINNERS As you rotate your right leg, focus on turning out your thigh. This reduces pressure on the right knee.



BENEFITS

◆ Enhances lung capacity

◆ Tones the muscles of the heart

◆ Relieves sciatic and arthritic pain

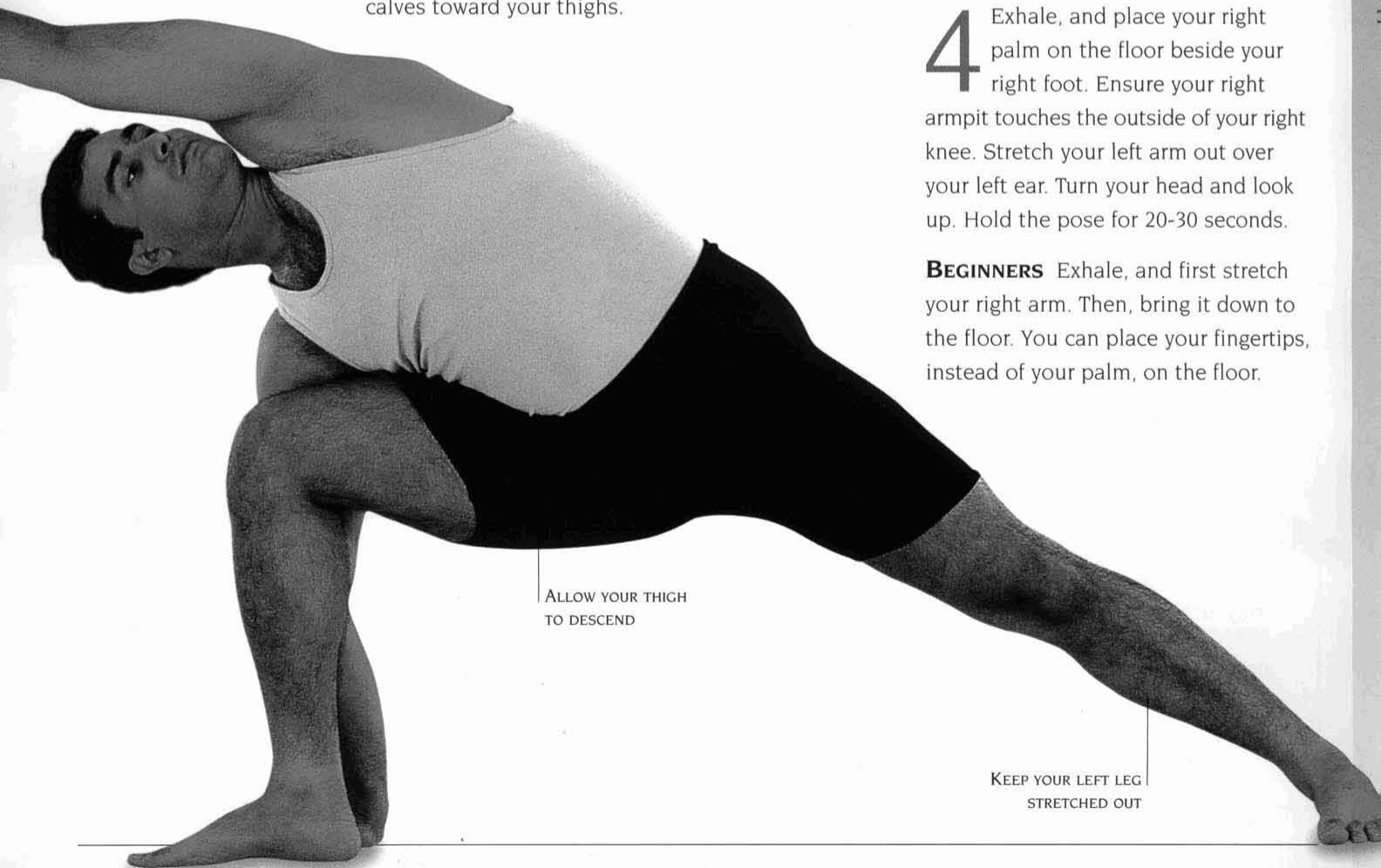
◆ Improves digestion and helps the elimination of waste

◆ Reduces fat on the waist and hips

3 Bend your right knee until your thigh and calf form a right angle, and your right thigh is parallel to the floor. Take one or two breaths.

PRESS DOWN ON THE FOURTH AND FIFTH TOES OF YOUR LEFT FOOT

INTERMEDIATES Consciously pull your left knee and ankle upward. Open the back of the left knee from the centre to the sides. Pull the muscles of both calves toward your thighs.



4 Exhale, and place your right palm on the floor beside your right foot. Ensure your right armpit touches the outside of your right knee. Stretch your left arm out over your left ear. Turn your head and look up. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds.

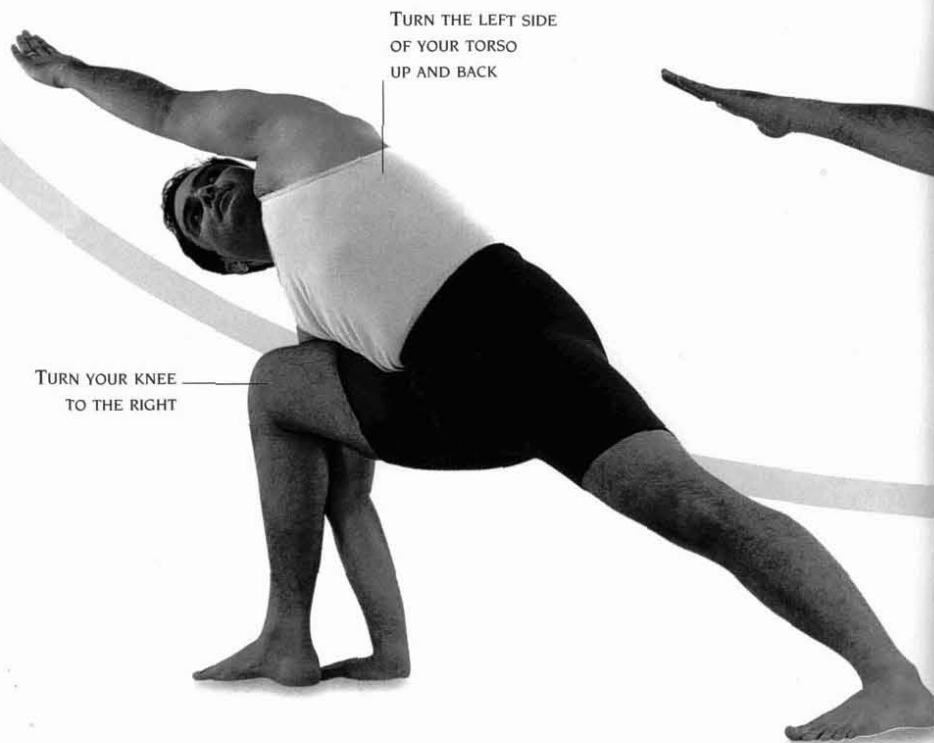
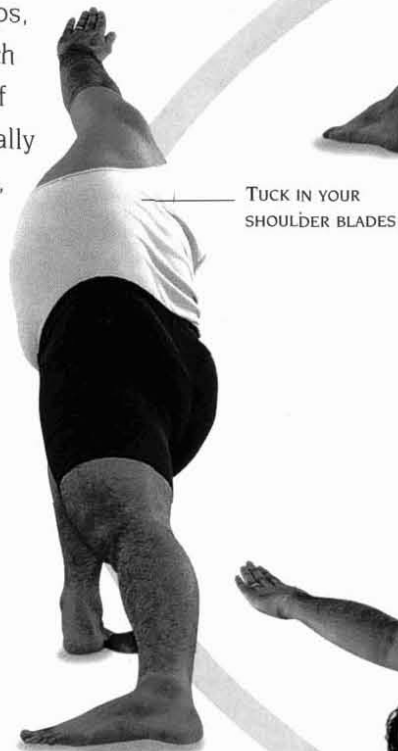
BEGINNERS Exhale, and first stretch your right arm. Then, bring it down to the floor. You can place your fingertips, instead of your palm, on the floor.

उत्थित पार्श्वकोणासन

Utthita Parsvakonasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

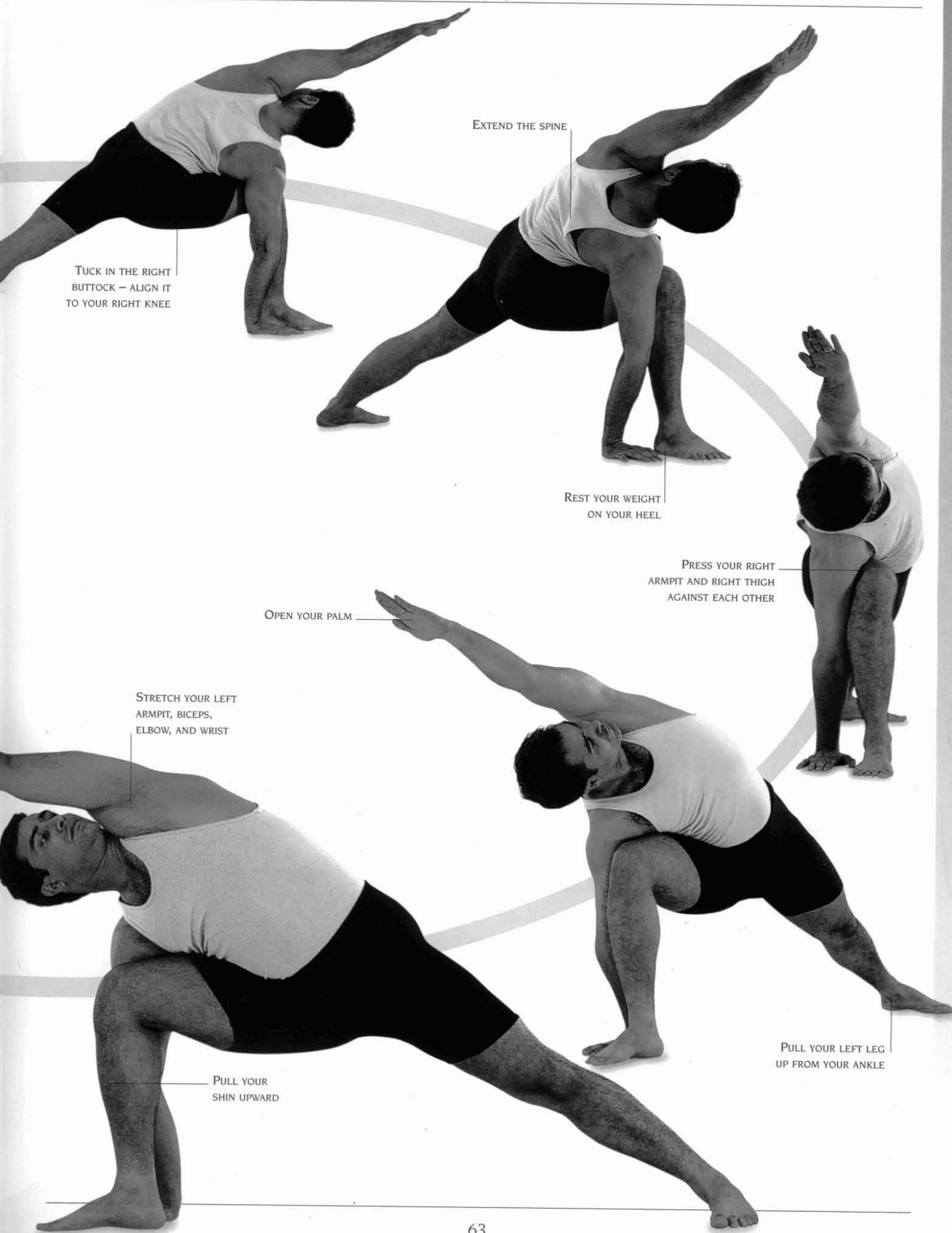
Your left arm is the "brain" of the pose (see page 45), so keep it stable and do not allow it to move. Increase the intensity of the stretch in this arm, pushing it away from the left armpit. Bring your lower shoulder blades into your back. Lift your left thigh slightly – this will help the right hand to descend more easily. Make sure you rest on the back of the right heel and do not allow dead weight to fall on your right thigh or palm. Keep your chest, hips, and left leg in line with each other. Stretch every part of your body, focusing especially on the spine. Feel a single, continuous stretch from your left ankle to your left wrist.



COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Inhale, and lift your right hand from the floor. Bring your arms to your sides and straighten your right leg. Turn both feet so that they face forward. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Then exhale, and jump back to Tadasana.



Parsvottanasana

- Intense chest stretch -

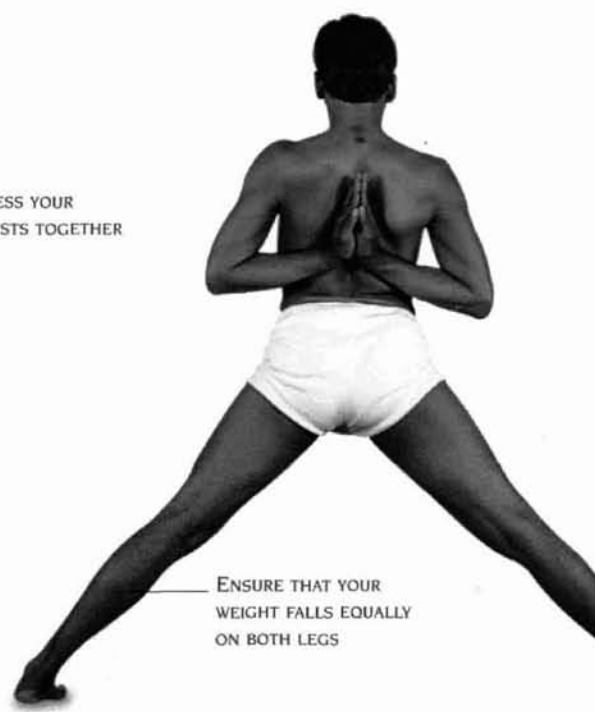
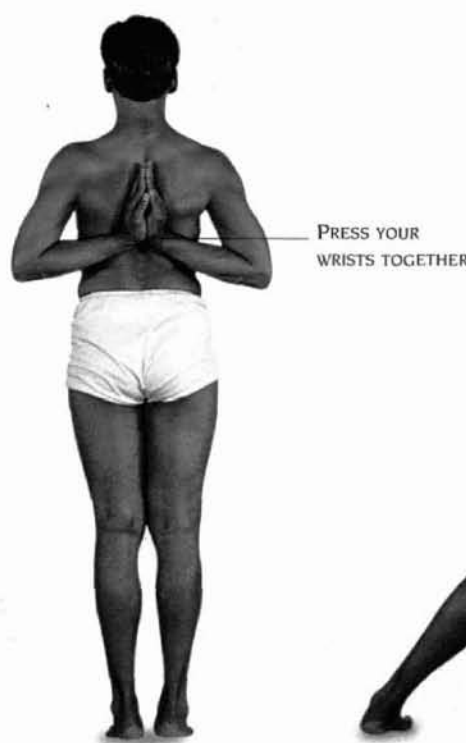


THIS ASANA GIVES an intense stretch to your chest. Parsva means "side" or "flank" in Sanskrit, while *uttana* indicates the great intensity of the final stretch. Regular practice of Parsvottanasana stimulates and tones the kidneys, an effect you can feel once you are comfortable in the final pose. The asana also helps to remove stiffness in the neck, shoulders, and elbows.

CAUTIONS

If you have high blood pressure or a cardiac condition, omit Step 4.

If you have dysentery or an abdominal hernia, practise this asana up to Step 4.



1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48). Loosen your arms by turning them inside and out several times. Join your fingertips together behind your



back, with your fingers pointing down, toward your feet. Then rotate your wrists (see inset), until your fingers point to the ceiling.

BEGINNERS If joining your palms is too difficult, take your arms behind your back, bend your elbows and rest each palm on the opposite elbow.

2 Move your joined palms up to the middle of your back. The little fingers of each hand should touch your back. Then, move your hands

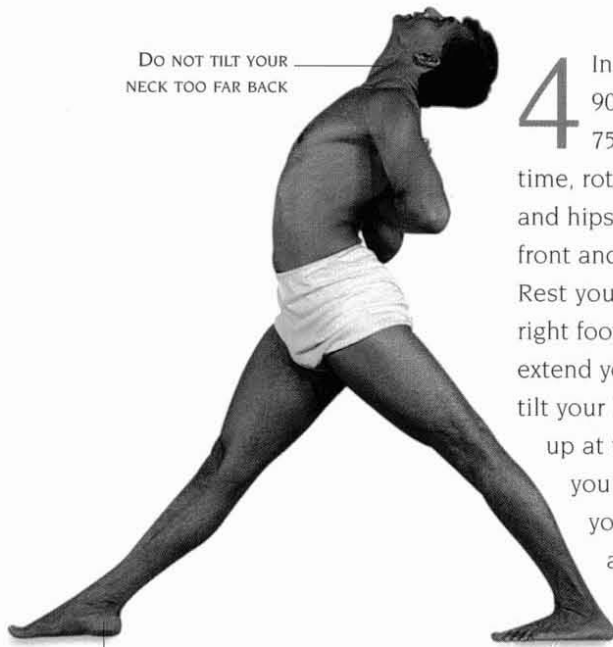


up your back (see inset) until they rest between your shoulder blades. Press your fingers together. Press your palms together by pushing your elbows inward. This will help to push your shoulders back and expand your chest even further.

3 Inhale and jump up, landing with your feet about 1.2m (4ft) apart.

If your legs feel overstretched or uncomfortably close together, adjust the distance accordingly. When you feel that your body weight is distributed equally – and comfortably – on both legs, you have the distance right. Pause for a few seconds and exhale slowly.

DO NOT TILT YOUR
NECK TOO FAR BACK



STRETCH YOUR RIGHT FOOT
SO THAT IT IS COMPLETELY
FLAT ON THE FLOOR

WIDEN YOUR ELBOWS

4 Inhale, and turn your right foot 90° to the right. Turn the left foot 75-80° to the right. At the same time, rotate to the right from the waist and hips. Ensure that your torso faces front and is in line with your right leg. Rest your weight on the heel of your right foot. Tighten your right knee and extend your chest, waist, and hips. Then, tilt your head and chest back and look up at the ceiling, making sure that you do not strain your throat. Press your palms to your back – do not allow them to slide down.

BENEFITS

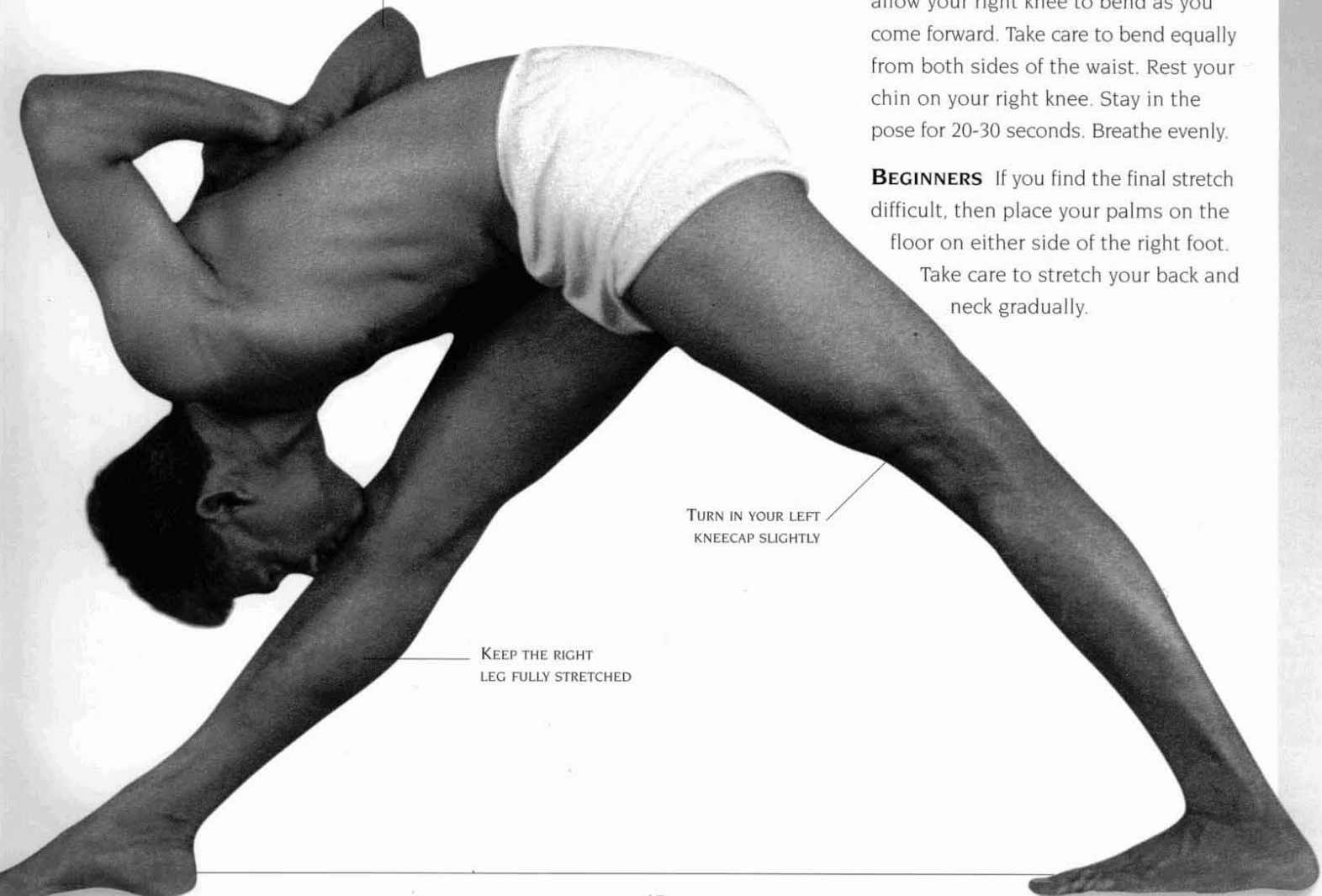
- ◆ Cools the brain and soothes the nerves
- ◆ Relieves arthritis of the neck, shoulders, elbows, and wrists
- ◆ Strengthens the abdominal organs
- ◆ Improves digestion
- ◆ Tones the liver and spleen
- ◆ Reduces menstrual pain

5 Exhale, extend the spine, and bend forward from the top of both your thighs. As you bend, lead with your sternum and do not allow your right knee to bend as you come forward. Take care to bend equally from both sides of the waist. Rest your chin on your right knee. Stay in the pose for 20-30 seconds. Breathe evenly.

BEGINNERS If you find the final stretch difficult, then place your palms on the floor on either side of the right foot. Take care to stretch your back and neck gradually.

TURN IN YOUR LEFT
KNEECAP SLIGHTLY

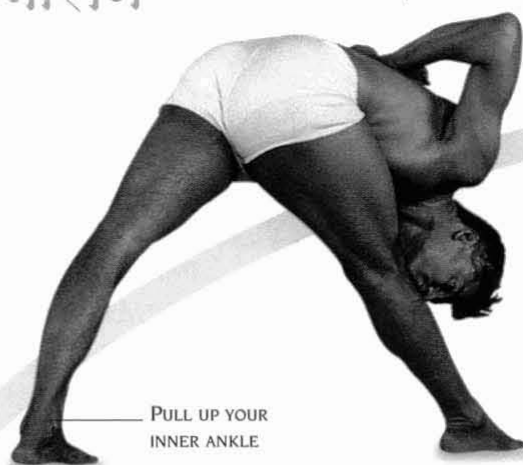
KEEP THE RIGHT
LEG FULLY STRETCHED



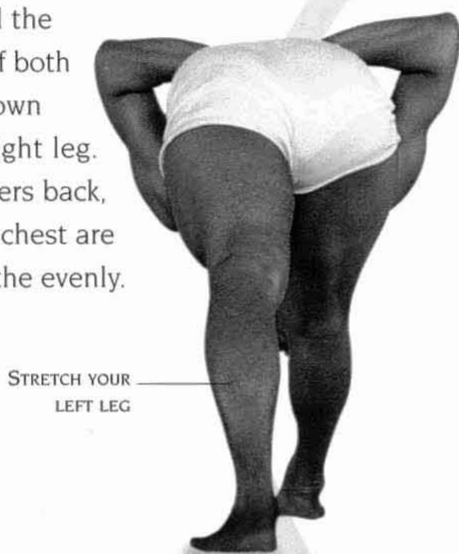
Parsvottanasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

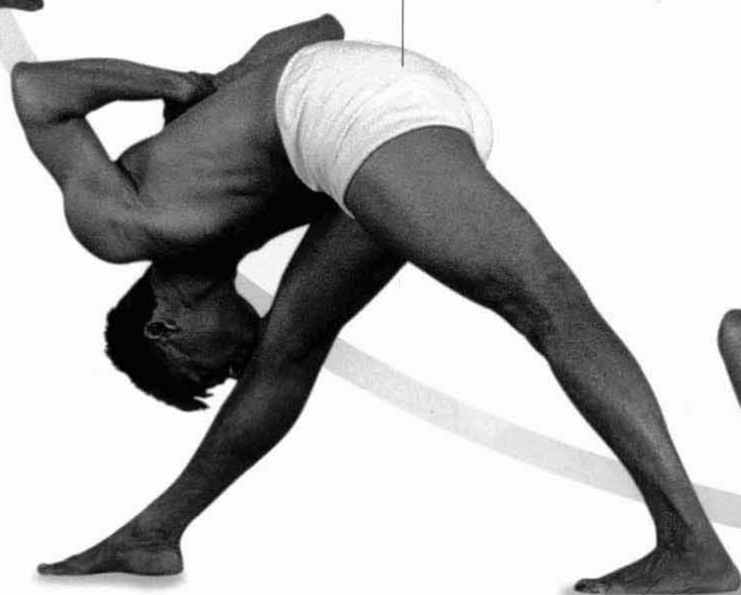
Maintain the stretch of your upper body, from the pelvis to the collar bones, while holding the pose. Elongate both sides of your waist evenly, to increase the stretch of your thighs. Bend down from your groin, keeping the perineum area passive. To ensure that your torso rests on the centre of your right thigh, move your abdomen slightly to the right, until your navel rests on the centre of your right thigh. Tighten the leg muscles and feel the stretch along the back of both legs. Push your spine down even further over your right leg. Move both your shoulders back, until both sides of your chest are equally expanded. Breathe evenly.



PULL UP YOUR
INNER ANKLE



STRETCH YOUR
LEFT LEG

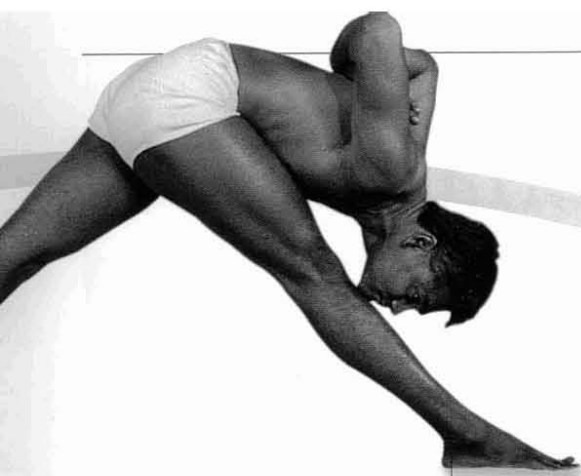


KEEP YOUR
BUTTOCKS PARALLEL
TO EACH OTHER

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Inhale, and lift your torso. Come back to a standing position, but do not raise your head immediately. Repeat the pose on the other side. Stretch out your arms to shoulder-level and jump your feet together. Stand in Tadasana.

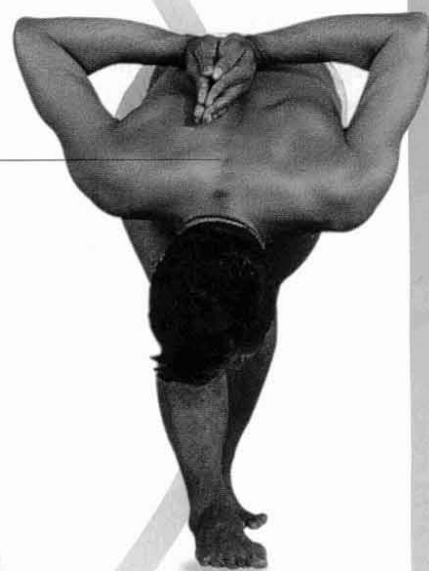
PRESS THE OUTER
EDGE OF YOUR LEFT
FOOT TO THE FLOOR



REST YOUR WEIGHT ON
YOUR RIGHT HEEL, NOT
THE FRONT OF THE FOOT

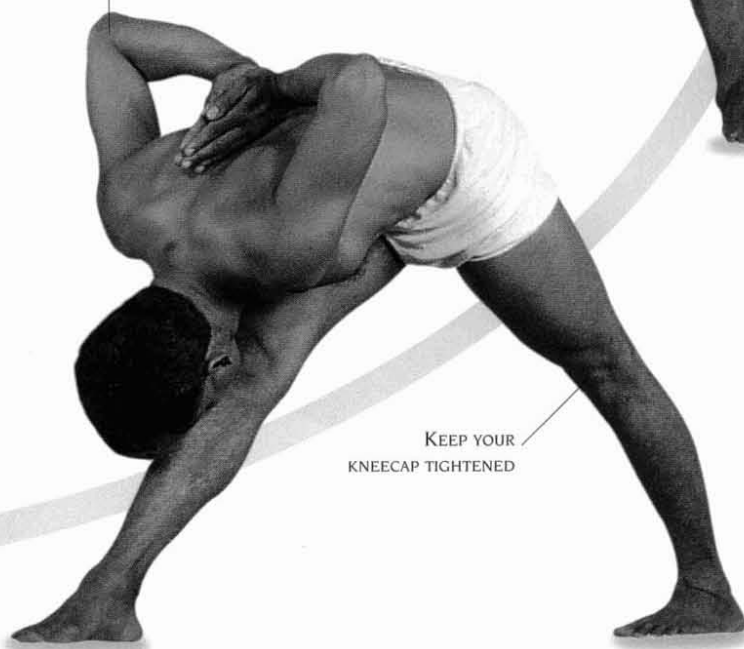


PRESS THE FINGERS
OF EACH HAND
TOGETHER



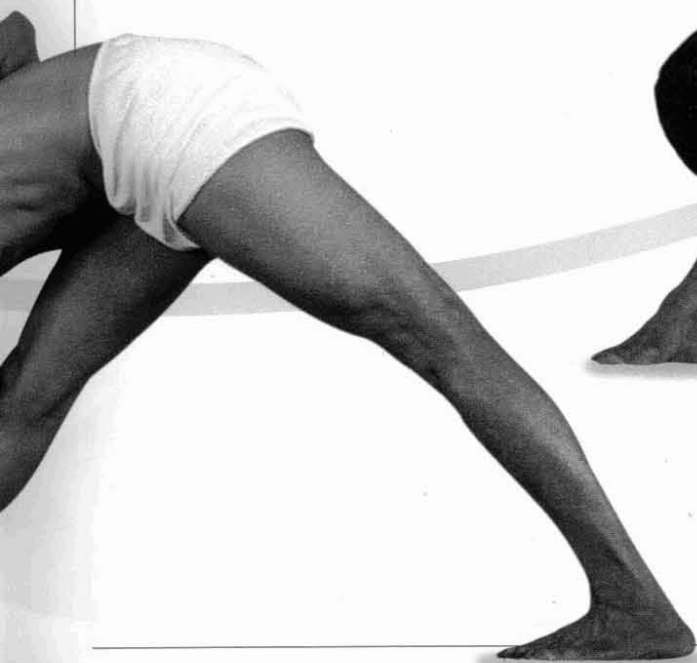
KEEP THE CENTRE OF YOUR
TORSO OVER THE
OUTSTRETCHED LEG

MAKE SURE YOUR
ELBOWS REMAIN LIFTED



KEEP YOUR
KNEECAP TIGHTENED

EXTEND THE SPINE



अधोमुख्य श्वानासन Adhomukha Svanasana

- Downward-facing dog stretch -



IN THIS ASANA, your body takes the shape of a dog stretching itself. *Adhomukha* means to have your "face downward" in Sanskrit, and *svana* translates as "dog". The asana helps runners, as it reduces stiffness in the heels, and makes the legs strong and agile. Holding the pose for one minute restores energy when you are tired. This asana gently stimulates your nervous system, and regular practice will rejuvenate your whole body.

CAUTIONS

If you have high blood pressure or frequent headaches, support your head with a bolster (see page 167). If you are prone to dislocation of the shoulders, ensure that your arms do not rotate outward. Do not practise this asana in an advanced stage of pregnancy.

1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48). Exhale, and bend from the waist, placing each palm on the floor beside each foot.

BEGINNERS Exhale, and bend from your waist. Bend both knees and place your palms on the floor next to your feet.

2 Bend your knees and step back approximately 1.2m (4ft), one leg at a time. Keep your palms about 1m (3-4ft) apart. Make sure that the distance between your feet is the same as that between your palms.

3 Position your right leg in line with your right arm, and your left leg in line with your left arm. Stretch your fingers and toes. Raise your heels, tighten the muscles at the top of your thighs, and pull your kneecaps in. Then stretch the arches of your feet and bring your heels down to the floor again.

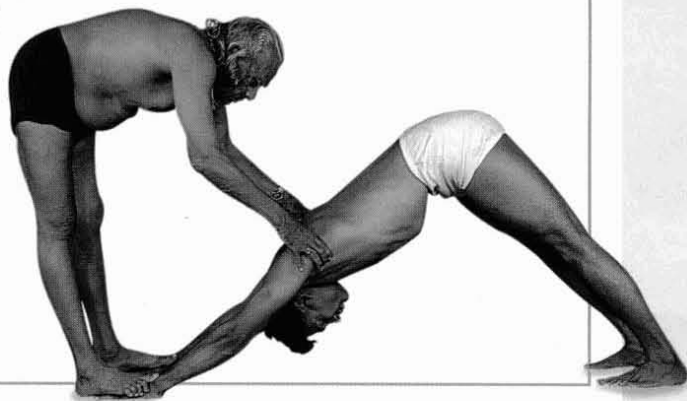
KEEP YOUR ARMS FULLY STRETCHED

KEEP YOUR FEET PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER

STRAIGHTEN YOUR ARMS

THE GURU'S ADVICE

"To make sure that my student's arms are straight, I stand on his hands to keep them firmly placed on the floor. Then I press his shoulder blades in, creating a right-angled triangle presentation of the pose. In this position, you should feel an intense stretch from your buttocks, along the dorsal and thoracic spine, right down to your palms."

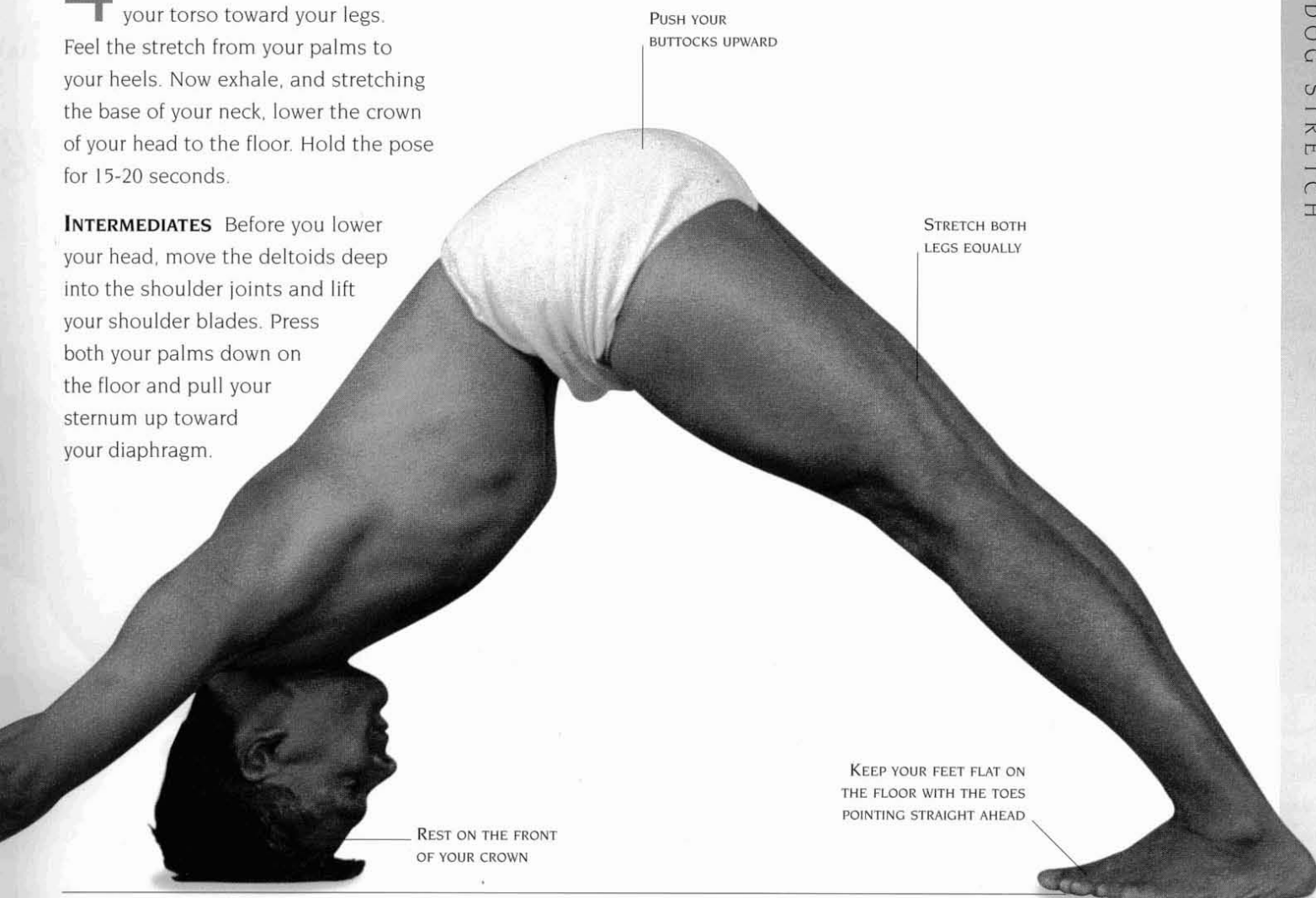


BENEFITS

- ◆ Calms the brain and gently stimulates the nerves
- ◆ Slows down the heartbeat
- ◆ Reduces stiffness in the shoulder blades and arthritis in the shoulder joints
- ◆ Strengthens the ankles and tones the legs
- ◆ Relieves pain in the heels and softens calcaneal spurs
- ◆ Checks heavy menstrual flow
- ◆ Helps to prevent hot flashes during menopause

4 Pull your inner arms up from the elbows to the shoulders. Move your torso toward your legs. Feel the stretch from your palms to your heels. Now exhale, and stretching the base of your neck, lower the crown of your head to the floor. Hold the pose for 15-20 seconds.

INTERMEDIATES Before you lower your head, move the deltoids deep into the shoulder joints and lift your shoulder blades. Press both your palms down on the floor and pull your sternum up toward your diaphragm.



अधोमुख्य श्वानासन

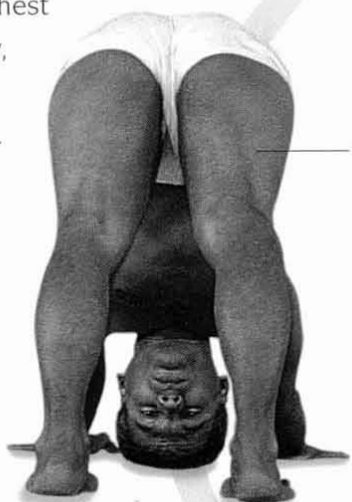
Adhomukha Svanasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

Move your legs as far back as possible. Ensure that both thighs are stretched equally – the inner and outer back edges should be parallel to each other. If your thighs are not parallel, they tend to shorten and lose their stretch. Similarly, keep your spine stretched out and do not compress it. Feel the energy in the spine flowing upward, from the neck to the buttocks, and not the other way round. Tuck in your shoulder blades and broaden your chest. As the chest opens out fully, your breathing becomes deep. Be aware of that depth.

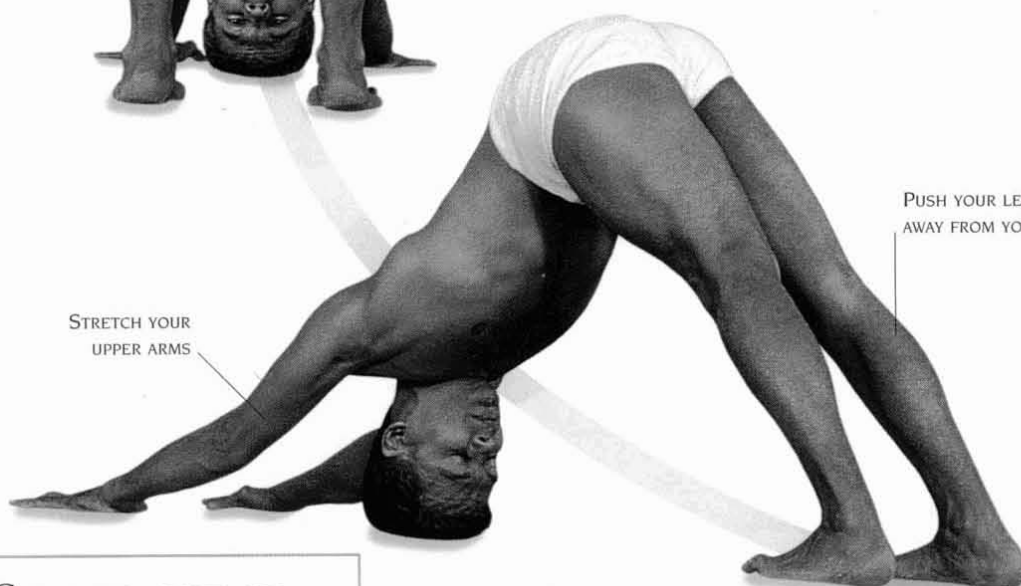


REST ON THE FRONT
YOUR CROWN



KEEP YOUR THIGHS
PARALLEL TO
EACH OTHER

*“The long and
practice of asanas
will bring*

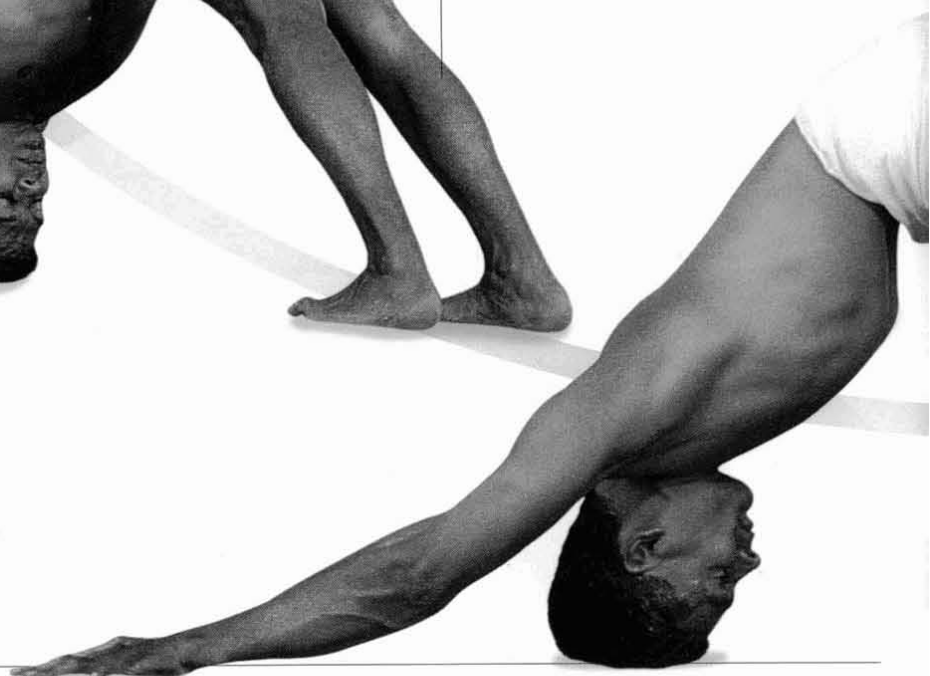


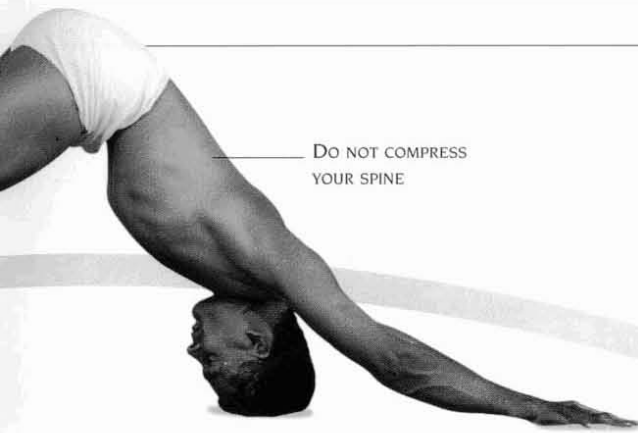
STRETCH YOUR
UPPER ARMS

PUSH YOUR LEGS
AWAY FROM YOUR BODY

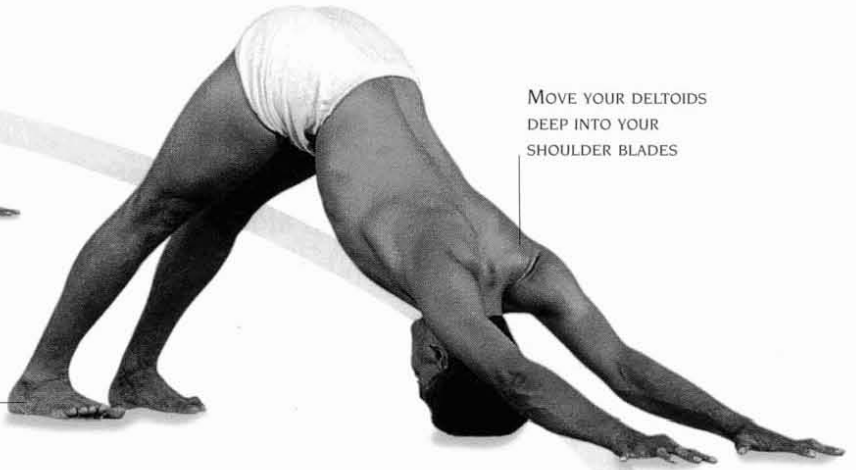
COMING OUT OF THE POSE

◆
Inhale, and gradually lift your head off the floor. Walk your feet toward your palms and come back to Tadasana.



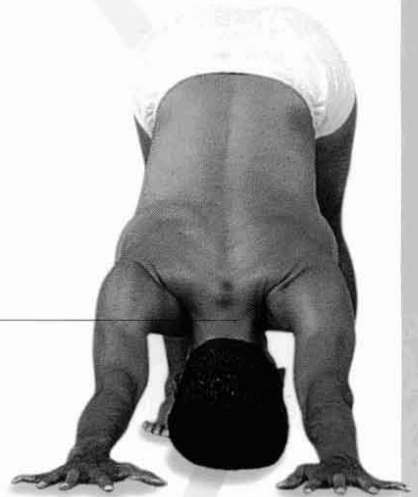


DO NOT COMPRESS
YOUR SPINE



MOVE YOUR DELTOIDS
DEEP INTO YOUR
SHOULDER BLADES

PRESS YOUR HEELS
DOWN ON THE FLOOR



KEEP YOUR NECK SOFT,
BUT ELONGATED

*uninterrupted
done with awareness,
success.”*



DO NOT BEND
YOUR KNEES

PUSH YOUR TORSO
TOWARD YOUR LEGS



उत्तानासन

Uttanasana

- Intense forward stretch -



THE SPINE RECEIVES a deliberate and intense stretch in this asana. The word *ut* means "deliberate" or "intense" in Sanskrit, while *tana* connotes "stretch". The practice of Uttanasana helps the body and the brain recover from mental and physical exhaustion.

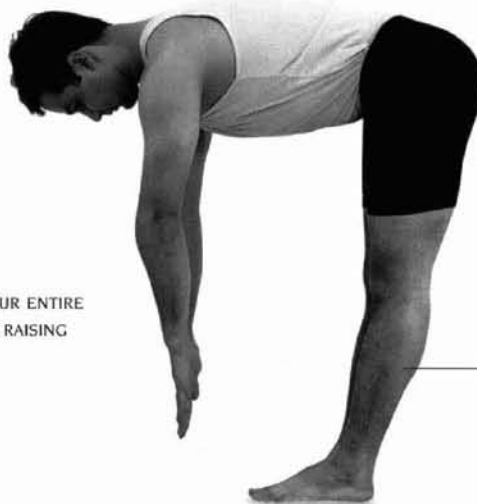
This asana can help those who are prone to anxiety or depression as it rejuvenates the spinal nerves and brain cells. It also slows down the heartbeat.

CAUTIONS

If you have a spinal disc disorder, stop at Step 3. Ensure that your spine is concave throughout the asana. Those prone to acidity or dizziness should practise this asana with the legs positioned slightly apart.



STRETCH YOUR ENTIRE
BODY WHILE RAISING
YOUR ARMS



EXTEND YOUR
CALF MUSCLES

2 Exhale, and bend forward from the waist. Keep your legs fully stretched. Make sure that your body weight is placed equally on both feet. Extend your toes.

KEEP YOUR
SPINE CONCAVE

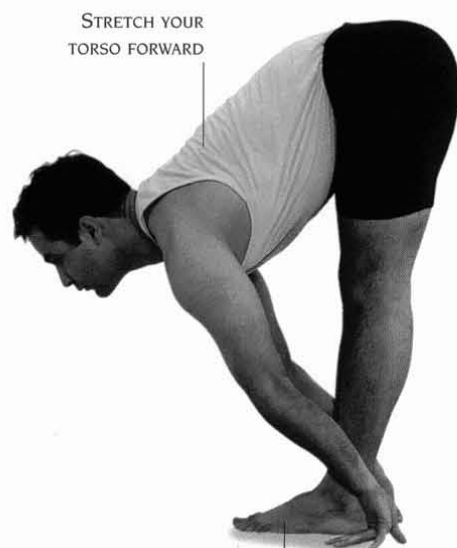


3 Bend your torso further and place your palms on the floor in front of your feet. Separate your ankles a little, to free your lower back, buttocks, and legs. Consciously stretch the skin at the backs of your knees and thighs.

1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48) with your legs straight and fully stretched. Tighten your kneecaps and then pull them upward. Raise your arms toward the ceiling, the palms facing forward. Stretch your whole body. Take one or two breaths.



BEGINNERS Lift your toes and press your heels down on the floor as you bend (see inset). Instead of your palms, you can rest your fingertips on the floor, until you are more flexible.



4 Move your hands back and place them next to your heels. Rest on your fingers and thumbs, with the palms raised off the floor. Keep your thighs fully stretched – feel the energy flow along the back of your legs, into the waist, and down your spine. Pull your kneecaps into your knees, and keep both knees parallel to each other and fully opened out at the back. The pressure on the inner and outer edges of your feet should be equal.

CORRECTING YOURSELF



WRONG If your knees bend, the tailbone juts out, impairing the pose.



RIGHT Stretch your thighs, keeping the kneecaps locked and pushed upward.



PRESS THE FRONT OF YOUR SOLES DOWN ON THE FLOOR

STRETCH YOUR ARMS FROM YOUR SHOULDERS

EXTEND YOUR THIGHS FROM THE KNEES TO THE HIPS

BENEFITS

- ◆ Relieves mental and physical exhaustion
- ◆ Slows down the heartbeat
- ◆ Tones the liver, spleen, and kidneys
- ◆ Relieves stomachache
- ◆ Reduces abdominal and back pain during menstruation

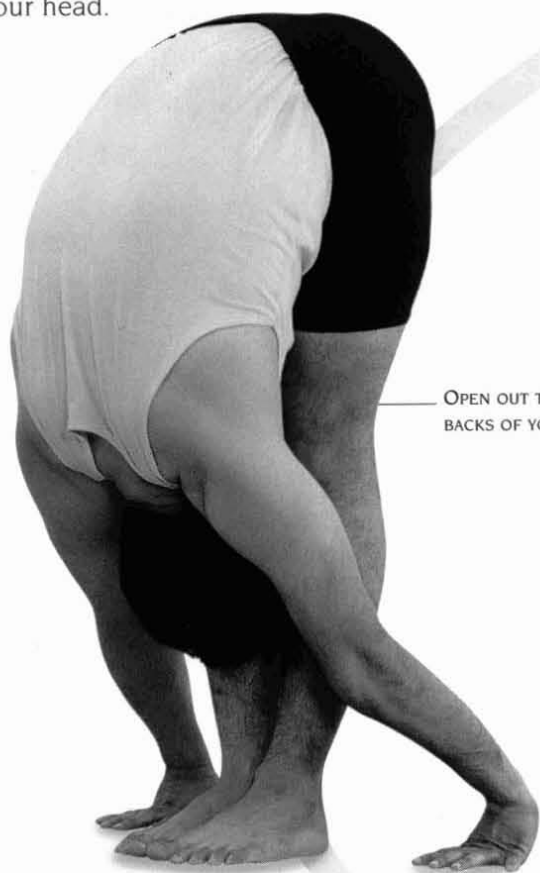
5 Exhale, and push your torso closer to your legs until your face rests on the knees. Push your torso and abdomen further down toward the floor until your chin touches both knees. Your chin should not touch your chest, as this will cause your neck and throat to tighten, leading to pressure on the head. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds, breathing evenly.

उत्तानासन

Uttanasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

When you place your fingers on the floor, turn your arms out and stretch them downward. Imagine you are pushing the skin of your arms down from your armpits to your fingertips. Focus on your ribs. Consciously stretch each rib, from the bottom of your ribcage right up to your armpits. Then, descend even further from your armpits. This will open the back of your inner thighs. Feel a continuous stretch from your heels to the crown of your head.



OPEN OUT THE
BACKS OF YOUR KNEES



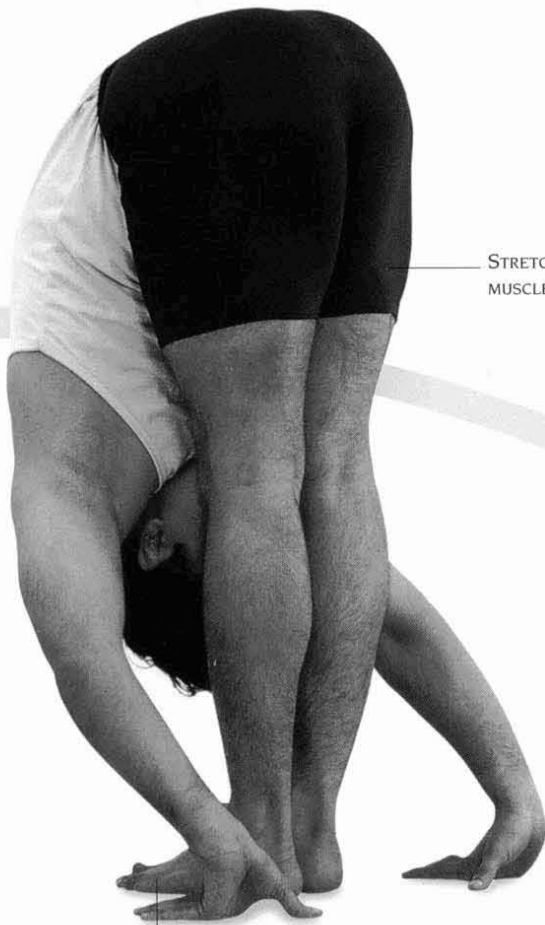
PUSH YOUR TORSO AND
SPINE DOWN

KEEP THE INNER SIDES
OF YOUR ANKLES, KNEES,
AND THIGHS TOGETHER

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

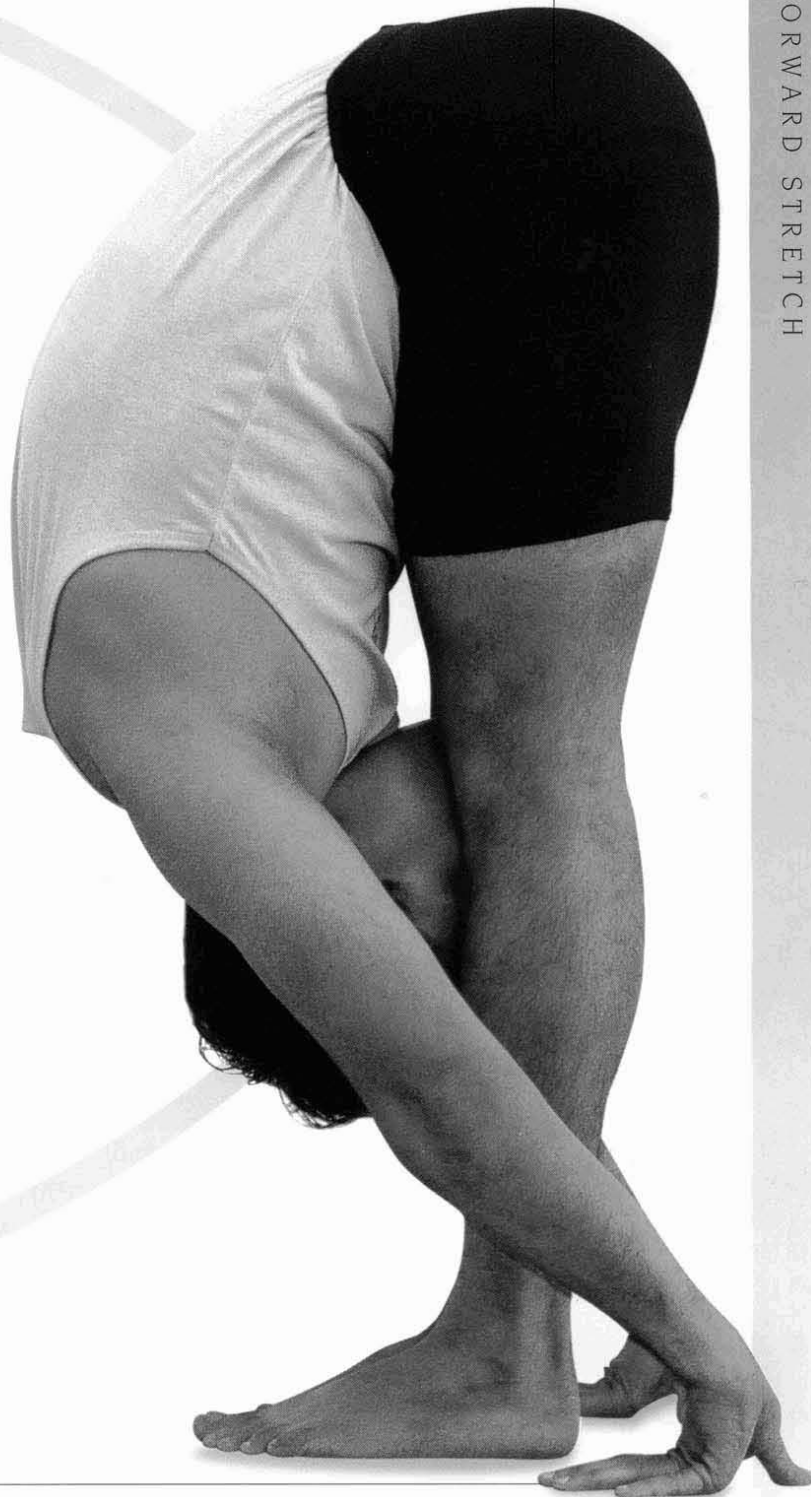
◆
Inhale, and raise your head without lifting your palms off the floor. Press your fingers into the floor and descend your armpits. Then, raise your torso gradually. Always be sure to come up with your back straight. Stand in Tadasana.

*“Your body exists
your mind exists in
they come together”*



STRETCH AND OPEN THE
MUSCLES OF YOUR THIGHS

EXTEND YOUR TOES FROM
THE ARCHES OF YOUR FEET



KEEP YOUR HIPS
PARALLEL TO THE FLOOR

*in the past and
the future. In yoga,
in the present.”*

वीरभद्रासन १

Virabhadrasana 1

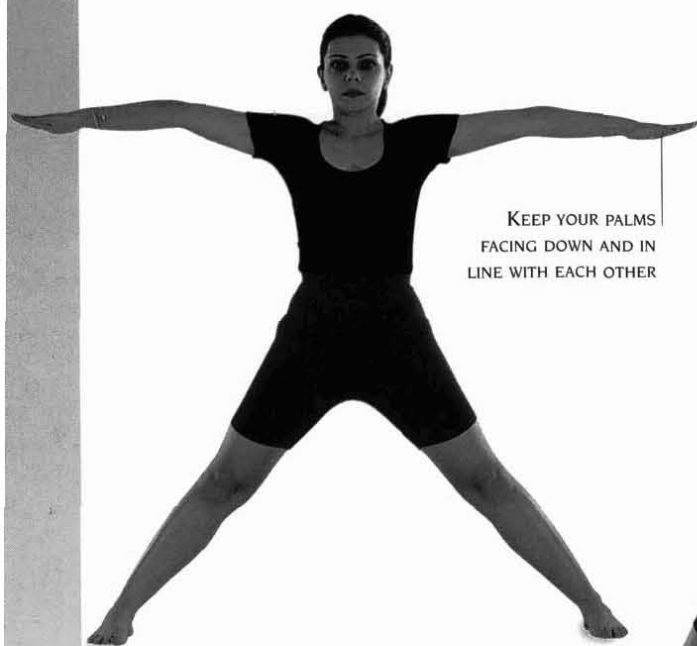
- Warrior pose 1 -



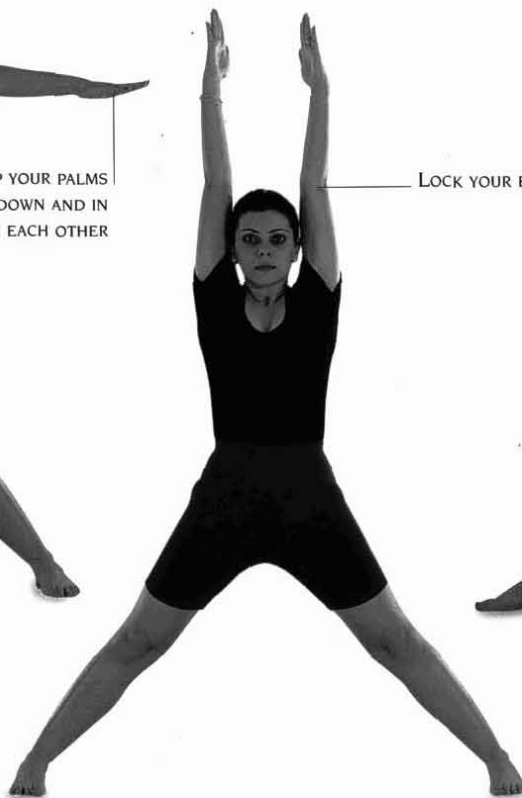
THIS ASANA, BASED ON a warrior pose, is a more intense version of Virabhadrasana 2 (see page 56). Both asanas are named after the mythic warrior-sage, Virabhadra. This vigorous asana strengthens your spine and increases the flexibility of your knees and thighs. The arms receive an intense stretch, and this expands the muscles of your chest and enhances the capacity of your lungs.

CAUTIONS

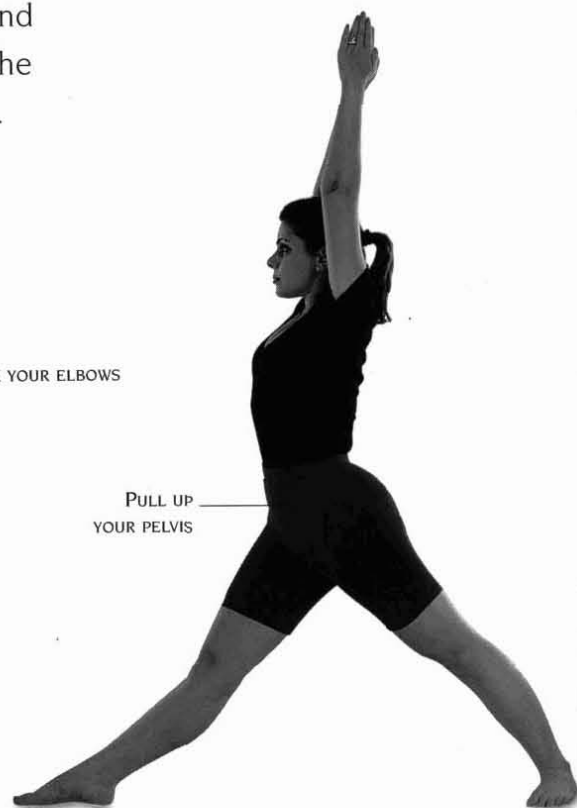
Do not practise this asana if you have high blood pressure or a cardiac condition.



KEEP YOUR PALMS
FACING DOWN AND IN
LINE WITH EACH OTHER



LOCK YOUR ELBOWS



PULL UP
YOUR PELVIS

1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48). Inhale and jump, landing with your feet about 1.2m (4ft) apart. Your feet should be in line, the toes pointing forward. Raise your arms up to shoulder-level, parallel to the floor. Lock your elbows. Press the little toes of both feet onto the floor. The outer edges of both feet should rest on the floor.

INTERMEDIATES For a more effective stretch, focus on the inner sides of your legs. Imagine that you are pulling the skin of both legs up from your heels to your waist.

2 Turn your wrists until your palms face the ceiling. Raise both arms until they are perpendicular to the floor and parallel to each other. Lift your shoulder blades and push them into your body (see inset).

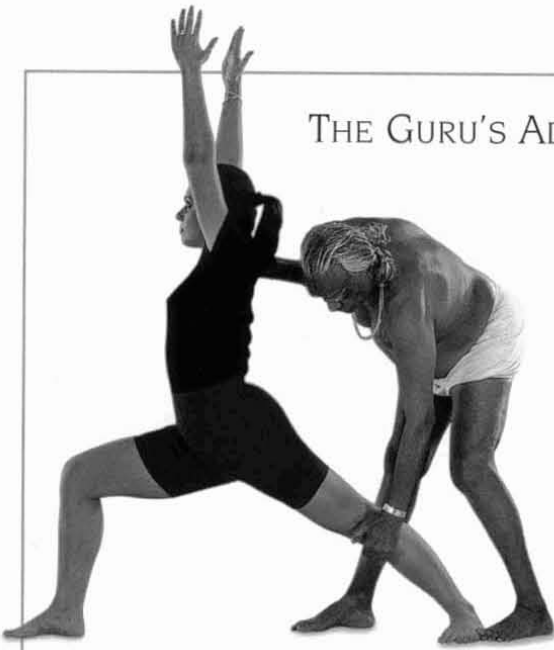


INTERMEDIATES Your elbows are the "brain" of your arms (see page 45). Stretch from your elbows to your fingertips.

3 Exhale, and turn your torso and right leg 90° to the right. Then turn your left leg to the right. Rotate your torso from the chest as well as the waist. The more you rotate to the right and stretch your upper arms, the more effective the pose.

INTERMEDIATES Be conscious of your left leg, and concentrate on the stretch from the back of your heel to the back of your thigh.

THE GURU'S ADVICE



"You must maintain the lift of the left knee. Simultaneously, adjust your shoulder blades by pushing them in, and then lifting them."

BENEFITS

- ◆
Relieves backache, lumbago, and sciatica
- ◆
Strengthens the back muscles
- ◆
Tones the abdominal muscles
- ◆
Relieves acidity and improves digestion
- ◆
Strengthens the bladder and corrects a displaced uterus
- ◆
Relieves menstrual pain and reduces heavy menstruation

PUSH OUT YOUR
UPPER CHEST

DO NOT HARDEN
YOUR SHOULDERS

YOUR KNEE SHOULD
BE IN LINE WITH
YOUR ANKLE

- 4** Exhale, and bend the right knee from the right buttock bone. The calf and thigh should form a right angle. Go down into the pose with resistance and then stretch the length of your body up to the ceiling. Make sure that the weight of your body does not fall on your right knee. Breathe evenly and stay in the pose for 15-20 seconds.

Virabhadrasana 1

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

Feel the stretch in your back to experience the pose. Push your shoulder joints into the armpits, stretching your arms up higher. Ensure that the upper part of your body is symmetrical, with both armpits parallel to each other. Your face, chest, and right knee should be in line with your right foot. To avoid straining your right knee, turn your kneecap out toward the little toe of your right foot. Your weight should rest on the inner edge of your left buttock and on the outer heel of the left foot. Focus on your left side as it controls the harmony of the pose. Feel the energy flow up your left leg.

TURN YOUR LEFT
BUTTOCK OUT SLIGHTLY

STRETCH BOTH SIDES
OF THE WAIST EQUALLY

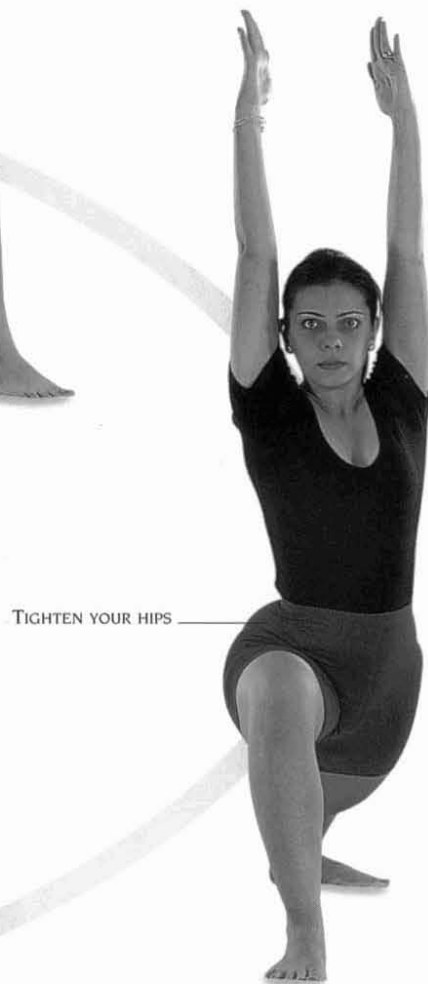
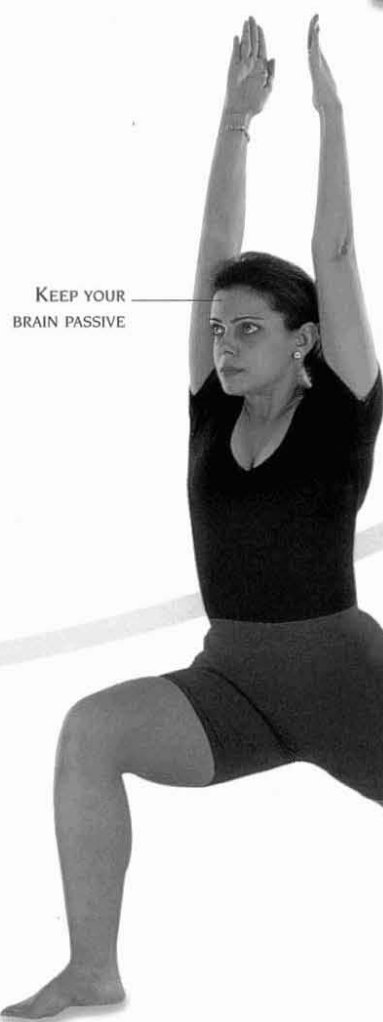
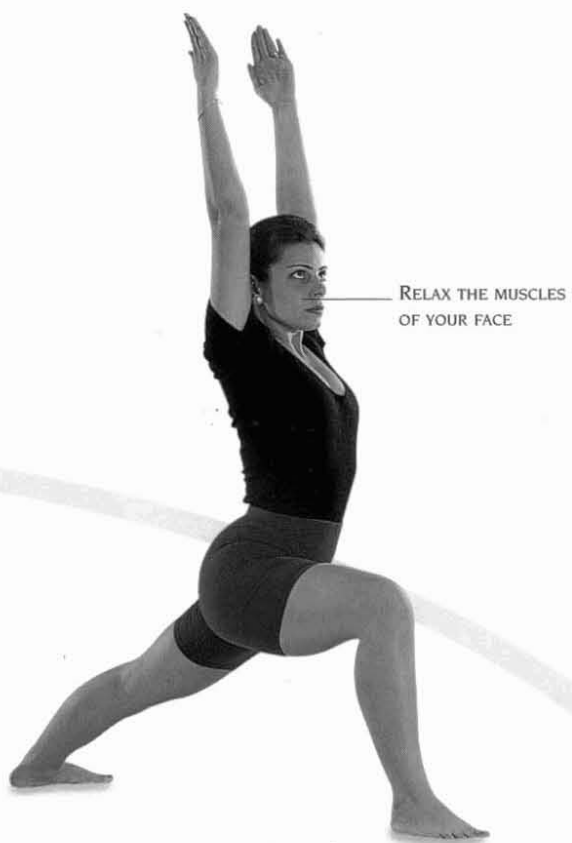
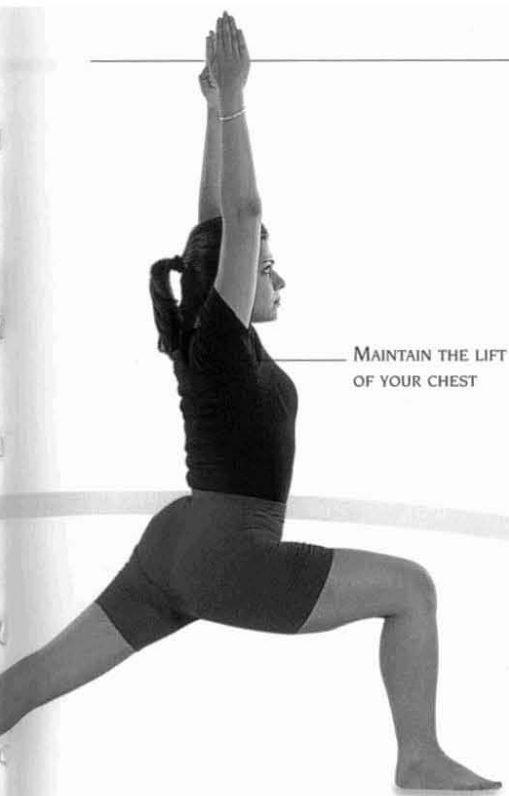
STRETCH YOUR ARMS FROM
THE SHOULDER BLADES

EXTEND YOUR SPINE
UP FROM THE TAILBONE

KEEP THE MUSCLES
OF THE RIGHT
THIGH RELAXED

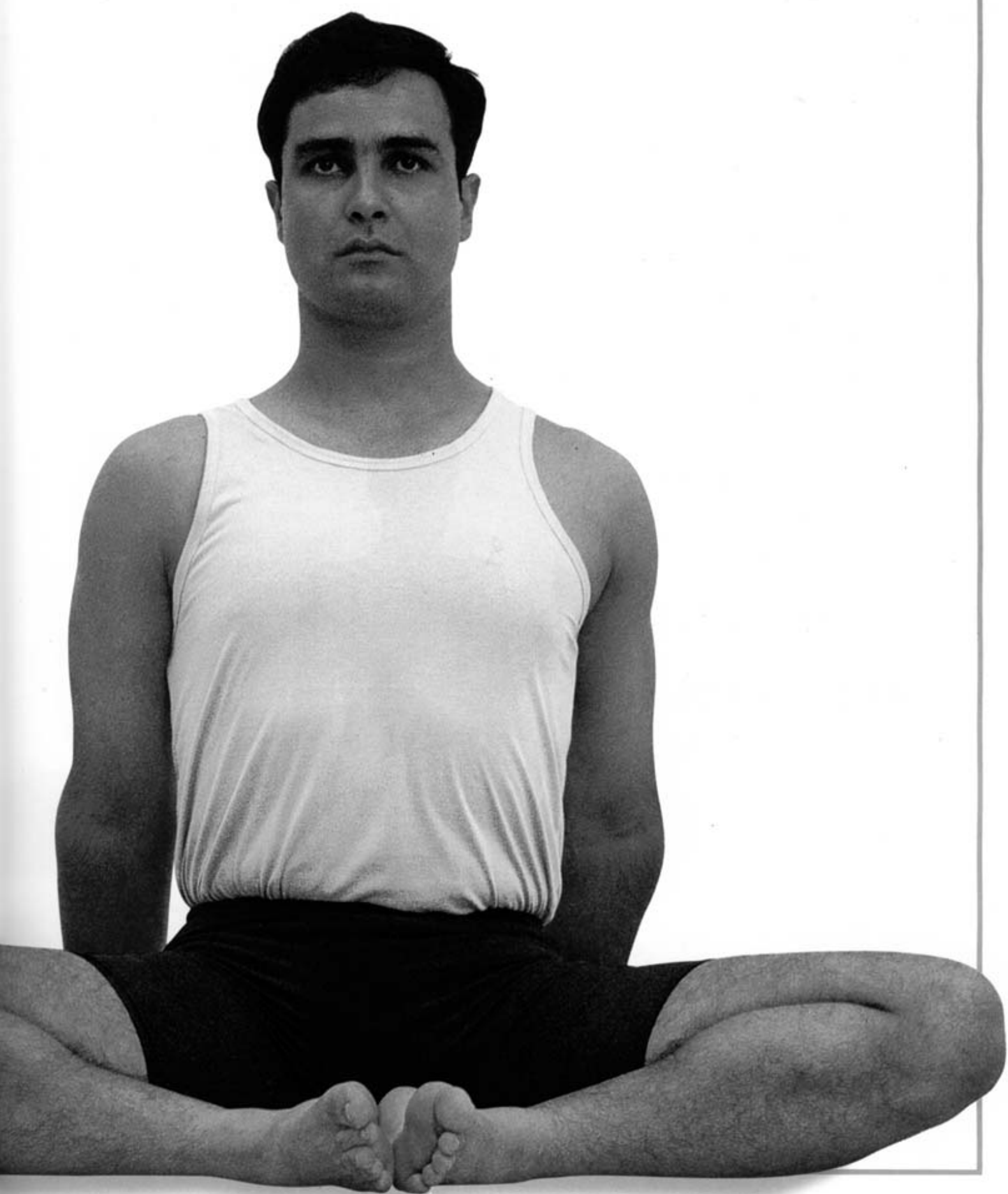
COMING OUT OF THE POSE

◆
Inhale, and stretch your arms out to your sides. Straighten your right knee and bring both your feet together, facing forward. Repeat the pose on the other side. Then exhale, and jump back to Tadasana.



Sitting Asanas

“Classic poses, when practised with discrimination and awareness, bring the body, mind, and consciousness into a single, harmonious whole.”



दंडासन Dandasana

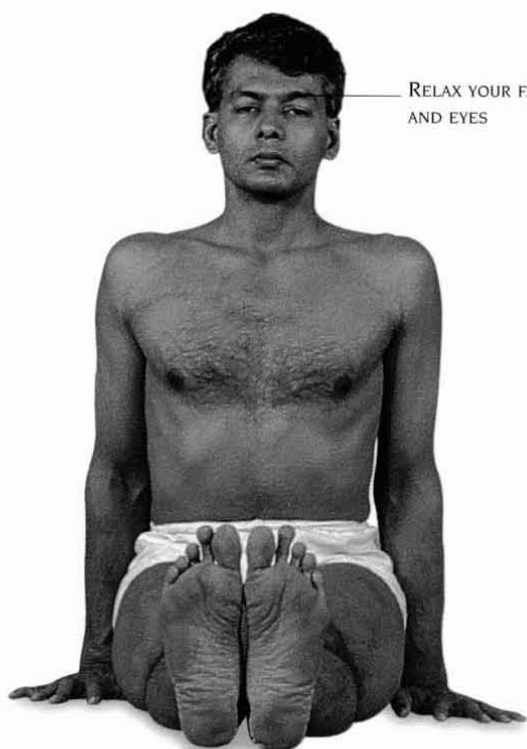
- Staff pose -



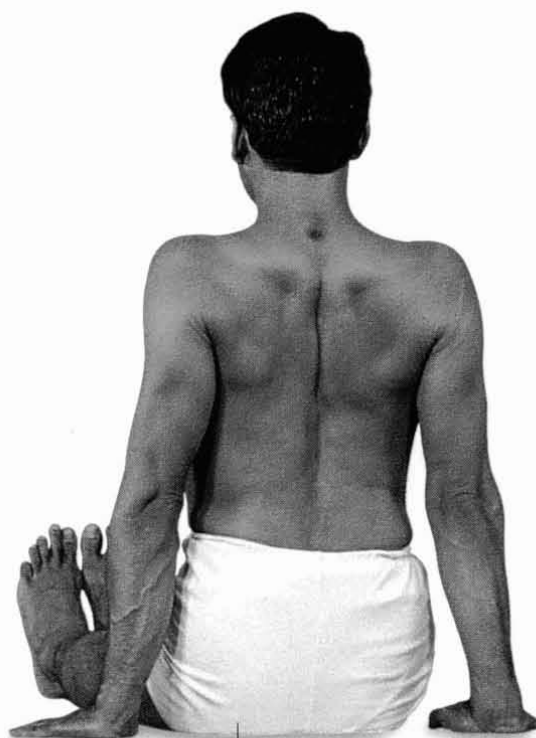
DANDASANA IS THE BASIC sitting pose for all forward bends. *Danda* means a "staff" or "walking stick" in Sanskrit, and regular practice of this asana improves your posture when seated. Your legs are rested during this asana, and it is recommended for people with arthritis or rheumatism of the knees and ankles. If you are prone to anxiety or mood swings, practising this asana helps to increase your will power and enhance your emotional stability.

CAUTIONS

♦
If your spine has a tendency to sag, or if you are experiencing a severe attack of asthma, practise this asana with the length of your spine supported against a wall.



RELAX YOUR FACE
AND EYES



REST ON YOUR
BUTTOCK BONES



1 Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out. Move the flesh of each buttock out to the side with your hands (*see inset*), so that you are resting on the buttock bones. Keep your thighs, knees, ankles, and feet together. Place your palms on the floor beside your hips, with your fingers pointing forward. Lift your chest. Lock your elbows and straighten your arms.



SPREAD OUT THE
SOLES OF YOUR FEET

BENEFITS

◆
*Relieves breathlessness, choking,
and throat congestion in asthmatics*

◆
Strengthens the muscles of the chest

◆
*Tones the abdominal organs and lifts
sagging abdominal walls*

◆
Reduces heartburn and flatulence

◆
Tones the spinal and leg muscles

◆
*Lengthens the ligaments
of the legs*

2 Tighten your quadriceps and pull them toward your groin. Press your thighs down on the floor, and counter that pressure by lifting your waist. Ensure that your diaphragm is free of tension. Lift your ribcage and keep your spine firm. Guard against digging your lower spine into the floor. Focus on keeping your head, neck, and buttocks in a straight line. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds. Breathe evenly.

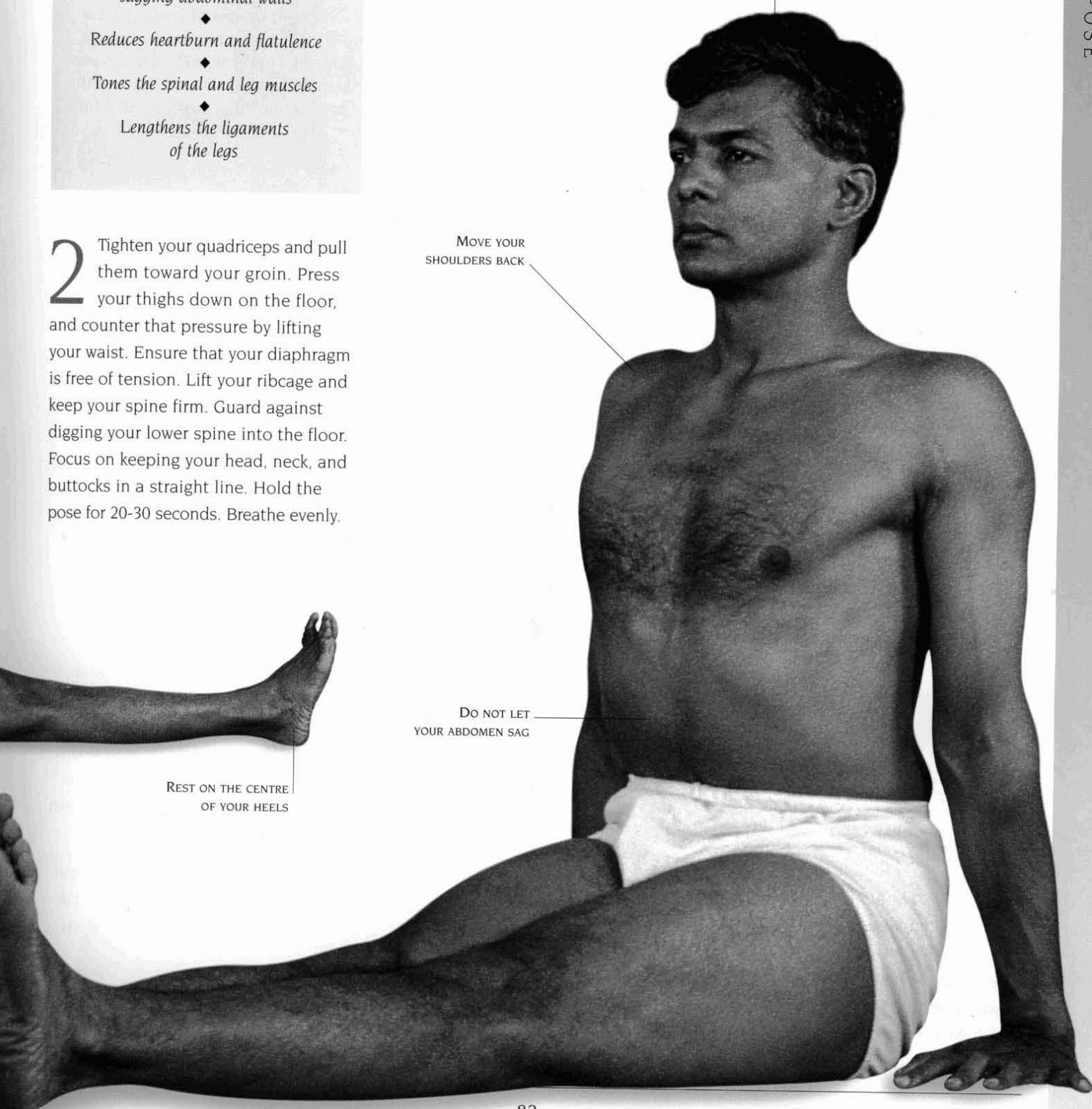


REST ON THE CENTRE
OF YOUR HEELS

MOVE YOUR
SHOULDERS BACK

DO NOT LET
YOUR ABDOMEN SAG

KEEP YOUR HEAD
AND NECK ERECT



वीरासन

Virasana

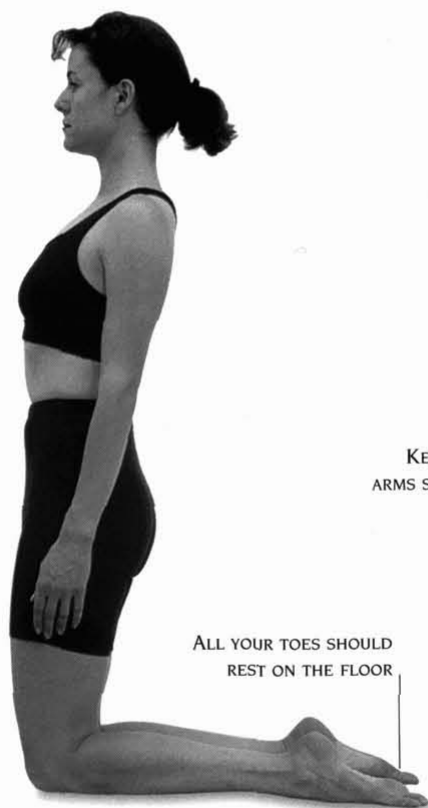
- Hero pose -



IN THIS ASANA, you assume the pose of a seated warrior. *Vira* in Sanskrit means "hero" or "warrior". Regular practice of this asana helps to develop your strength and endurance. The asana stretches the chest and increases your capacity for deep breathing. Virasana relieves stiffness in the joints and improves the flexibility of your whole body.

CAUTIONS

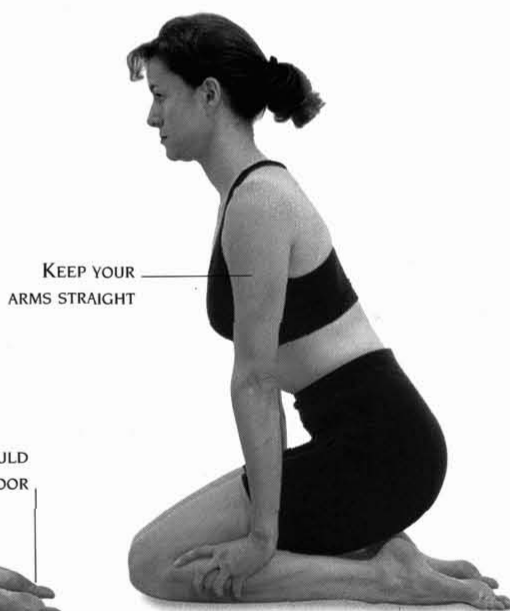
If the ligaments of your knee are injured, use a blanket to support your legs (see page 167), or sit on your heels (see Step 2). Do not practise this pose if you have a cardiac condition.



ALL YOUR TOES SHOULD
REST ON THE FLOOR

1 Kneel on the floor with your knees together. Spread your feet about 0.5m (18in) apart, with your soles facing the ceiling.

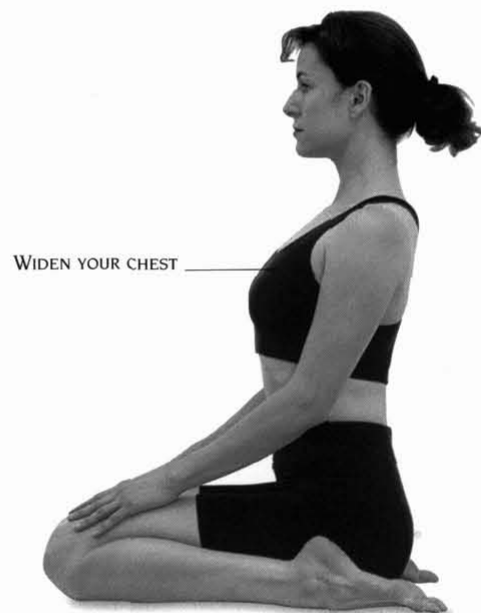
INTERMEDIATES Adjust your ankles so that they stretch evenly from the arch to the toes and from the arch to the heels. Feel the energy flow smoothly in both directions.



KEEP YOUR
ARMS STRAIGHT

2 Lean forward and rest your palms on your shins. Lower your buttocks toward the floor. Make sure that the inner side of each calf touches the outer side of each thigh. Turn your calf muscles outward and ensure that you turn your thigh muscles inward.

BEGINNERS If you cannot rest your buttocks on the floor, place one sole on top of the other and rest your buttocks on them. Separate your feet.

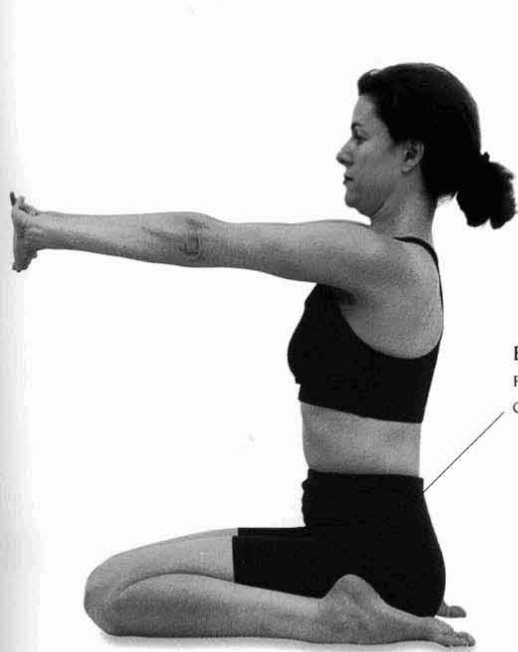


WIDEN YOUR CHEST

3 Rest your buttocks on the floor. Do not sit on your feet. Place both palms on your thighs, close to the knees. Rest your weight on your thighs. Raise your waist and the sides of your torso, and press your shins firmly down on the floor.

BEGINNERS Place your palms on your knees and push your thighs down. Lift your torso from the base of the pelvis.

INTERMEDIATES Imagine that your legs are tied to the floor, then lift your torso. Feel the energy flow upward from the bottom of your chest.



4 Raise your arms to shoulder-level. Stretch them forward, parallel to the floor. With your palms facing you (see inset below), firmly interlock your



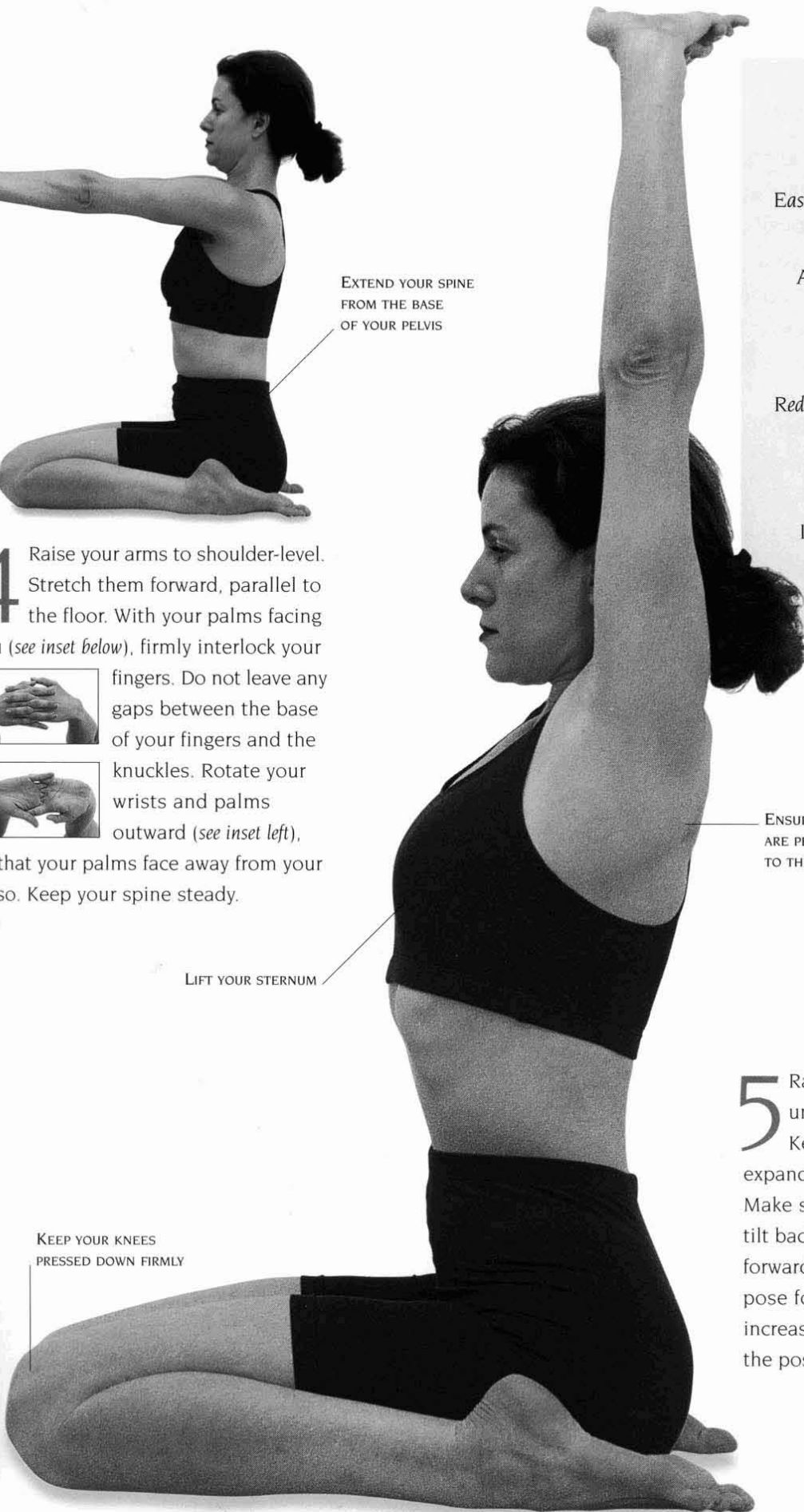
fingers. Do not leave any gaps between the base of your fingers and the knuckles. Rotate your wrists and palms outward (see inset left),



so that your palms face away from your torso. Keep your spine steady.

LIFT YOUR STERNUM

KEEP YOUR KNEES
PRESSED DOWN FIRMLY



BENEFITS

- ◆ Relieves gout
- ◆ Eases stiffness in the shoulders, neck, hip joints, knees, and groin
- ◆ Alleviates arthritis of the elbows and fingers
- ◆ Relieves backache
- ◆ Reduces the pain of broken, deviated, or fused tailbones
- ◆ Corrects herniated discs
- ◆ Improves circulation in the feet
- ◆ Relieves calcaneal spurs

5 Raise your arms from the armpits until the palms face the ceiling. Keep your neck erect, your chest expanded, and your elbows straight. Make sure that your head does not tilt back, and your body does not lean forward. Breathe evenly, and hold the pose for 1 minute. With practice, increase the length of time spent in the pose to 5 minutes.

Virasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

The intelligence of the body is energy, while the intelligence of the brain is consciousness. This energy moves with each action. When you stretch your arms upward, it is a physical action. Lifting the arms from the armpits after locking the elbows and deltoids, is an action done by the physiological body (see page 42). When you raise your arms, you will feel the energy move to the front of your legs. With every move, the energy in your legs flows to a different position. As the mind moves with this energy, focus on your legs. Imagine you are releasing the energy of your legs into the floor as you stretch your arms up even further. This will calm your mind and free your body of tension.

REST YOUR WEIGHT
ON YOUR KNEES

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Bring your arms down to your sides. Place your palms on the floor and raise your buttocks. Kneel, and then straighten your legs, one by one.

TUCK IN YOUR
SHOULDER BLADES

STRETCH AND STRAIGHTEN
YOUR SPINE BY CONTRACTING
YOUR BUTTOCKS

*"The practice
change a person
a positive"*



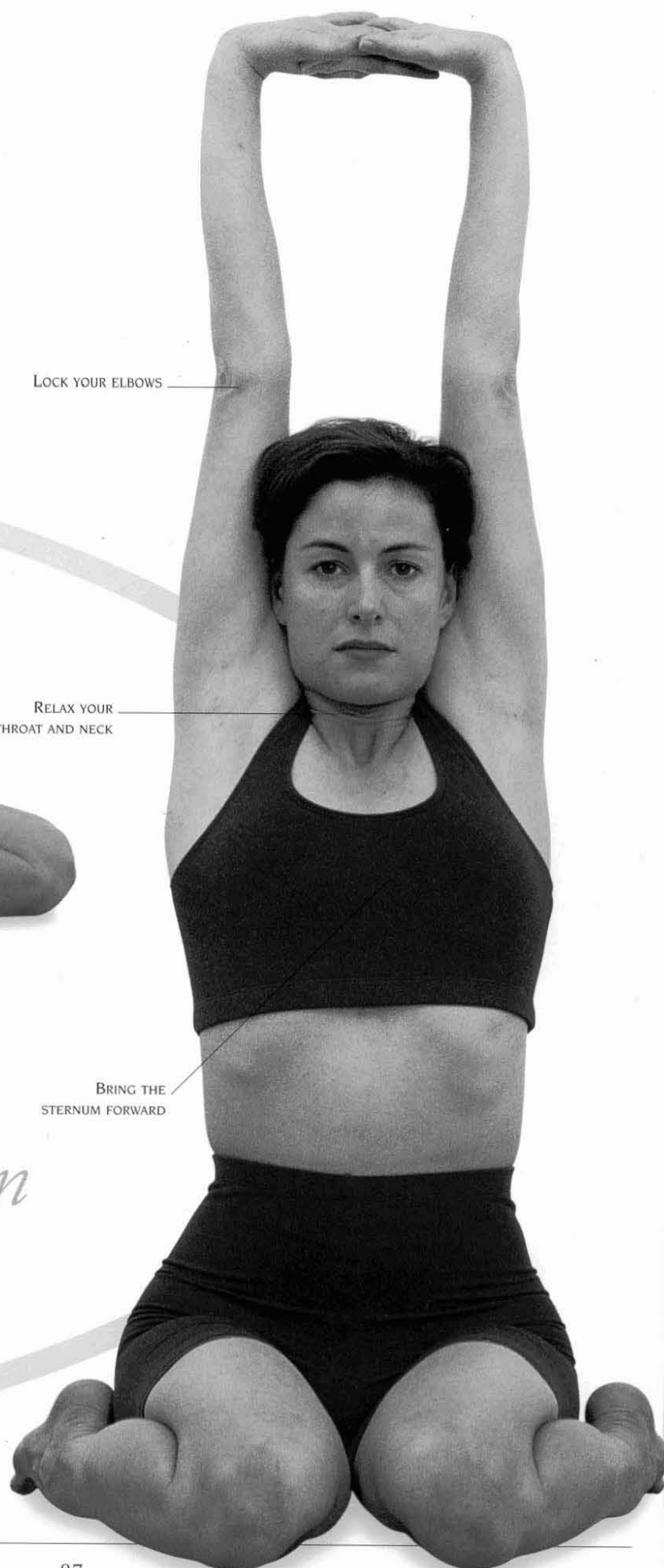
KEEP YOUR
HEAD STRAIGHT

LOCK YOUR ELBOWS

DO NOT ALLOW
YOUR BODY TO
LEAN FORWARD

RELAX YOUR
THROAT AND NECK

*of yoga helps to
mental attitude in
way."*



BRING THE
STERNUM FORWARD

बद्ध कोणासन

Baddhakonasana

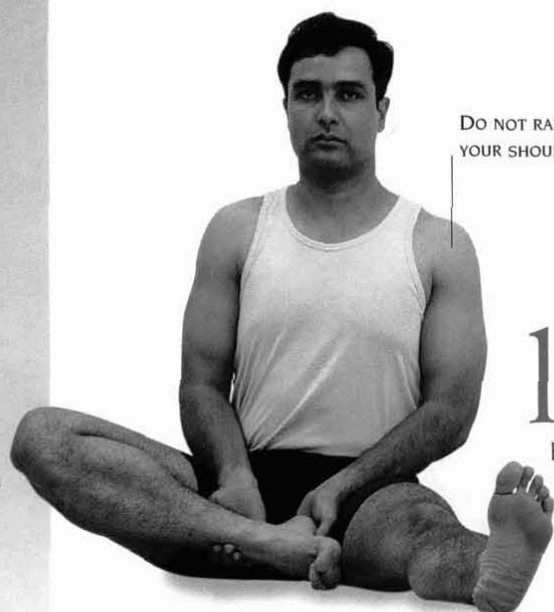
- Fixed angle pose -



IN SANSKRIT, *baddha* means “bound” or “caught” and *kona* translates as “angle”. Regular practice of Baddhakonasana increases the flow of blood to the abdomen, pelvis, and back. It helps to treat arthritis of the knee, hip, and pelvic joints. Pregnant women will experience less pain during labour and will be free of varicose veins if they hold the pose for a few minutes each day. You can practise this asana at any time, even just after a meal.

CAUTIONS

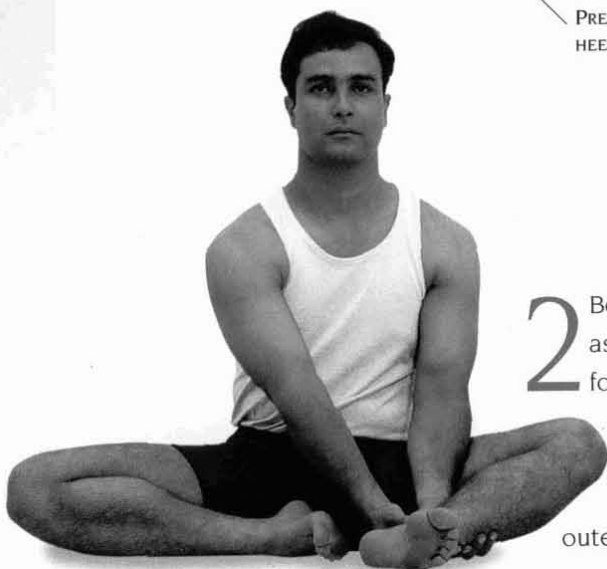
Do not practise this asana if you have a displaced or prolapsed uterus.



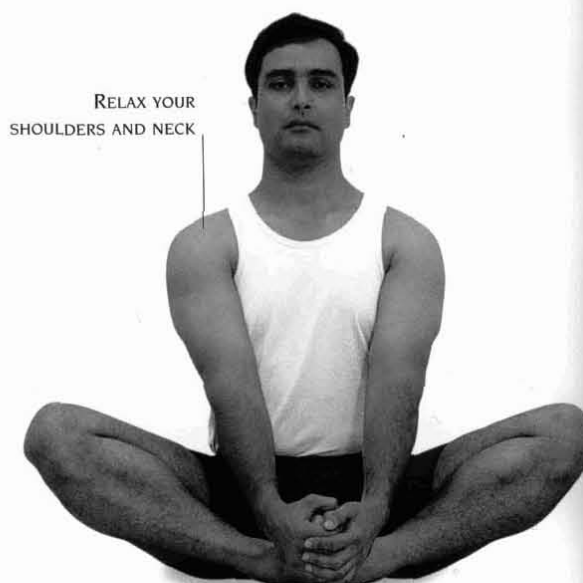
DO NOT RAISE
YOUR SHOULDERS

1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Bend your right knee and hold your right ankle and heel with both hands. Draw your right foot toward your groin. Keep your left leg straight and resting on the floor.

PRESS YOUR LEFT
HEEL DOWN FIRMLY



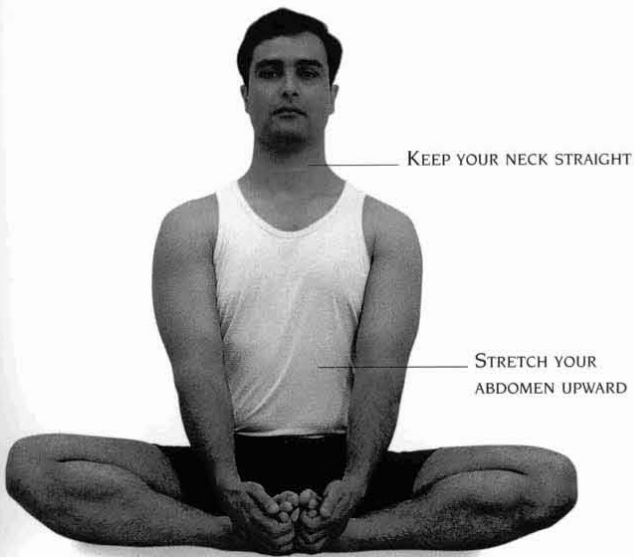
2 Bend your left knee the same way as your right knee. Pull your left foot toward your groin, until the soles of both feet touch each other. Make sure that both heels touch the groin. Rest the outer edges of both feet on the floor.



RELAX YOUR
SHOULDERS AND NECK

3 Hold your feet firmly near the toes with both hands. Pull your heels even closer to your groin. Stretch your spine upward. Widen your thighs and push your knees down toward the floor. Look straight ahead. Stay in this position for 30-60 seconds.

INTERMEDIATES Maintain your hold on your feet – the firmer your grip, the better the lift of the torso. Stretch out both sides of your chest.



4 Push both your knees down by pressing your thighs firmly down on the floor. Stretch your knees away from the torso (see inset). This will



also help to bring them down to the floor. Then, pull your heels back

to the groin and relax your groin. Press your ankles and shins down to the floor and push your soles lightly toward each other. Straighten both your arms by stretching your torso upward even further. Breathe evenly.

BEGINNERS It is difficult at first, to bring your knees down to the floor. Focus on your groin and consciously relax it.

BENEFITS

- ◆ Keeps the kidneys and prostate gland healthy
- ◆ Helps to treat urinary tract disorders
- ◆ Reduces sciatic pain
- ◆ Prevents hernia
- ◆ Relieves heaviness and pain in the testicles, if practised regularly
- ◆ Keeps the ovaries healthy
- ◆ Corrects irregular menstruation
- ◆ Helps to open blocked fallopian tubes and reduces vaginal irritation

5 Take your hands behind your back and place both palms on the floor. Keep your fingers pointing toward your buttocks. Push your shoulders back. Stay in this pose for 30-60 seconds, breathing deeply.

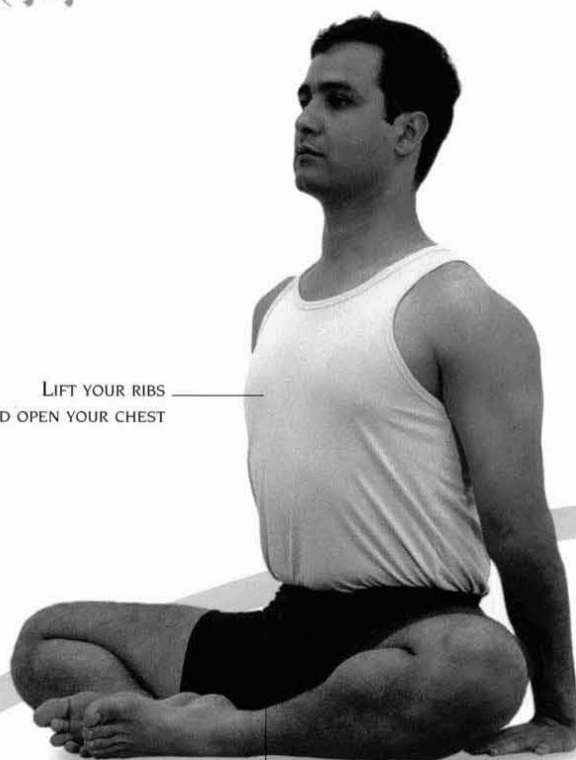


Baddhakonasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

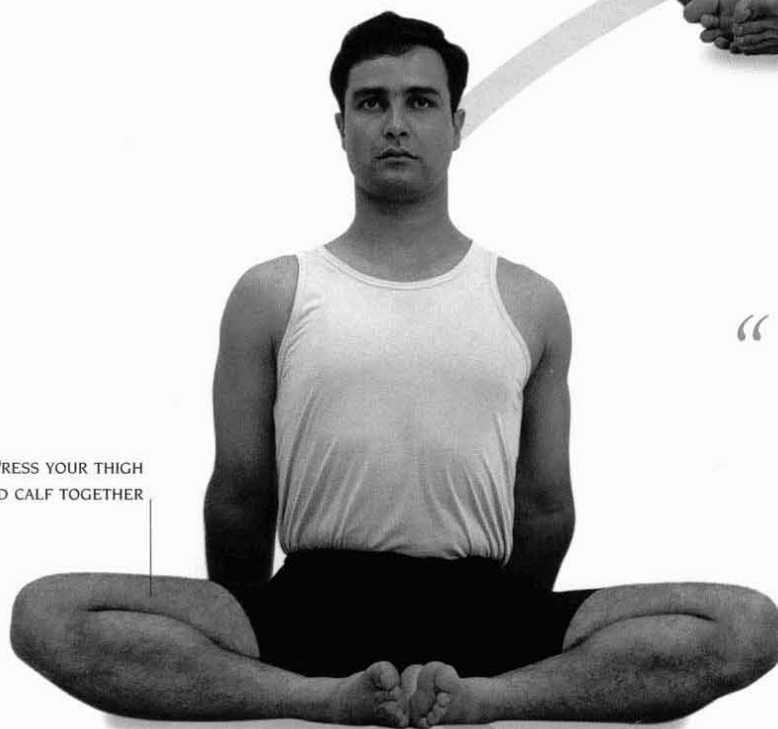
Once you are comfortable in the final pose, learn to open your chest, stretching it outward from all sides. Imagine that your legs are tied to the floor, so that you raise your front ribs and lift your torso without disturbing the position of your lower limbs. Then, focus on your kidneys – imagine you are pulling them into your body. Keep your back absolutely straight. Inhale and exhale deeply, feeling your energy flow from the bottom of your chest, over your shoulders and down along the spine into the abdomen in one continuous, cyclical flow. Gradually increase the length of time you stay in this pose to 5 minutes.

LIFT YOUR RIBS
AND OPEN YOUR CHEST



KEEP YOUR GROIN RELAXED

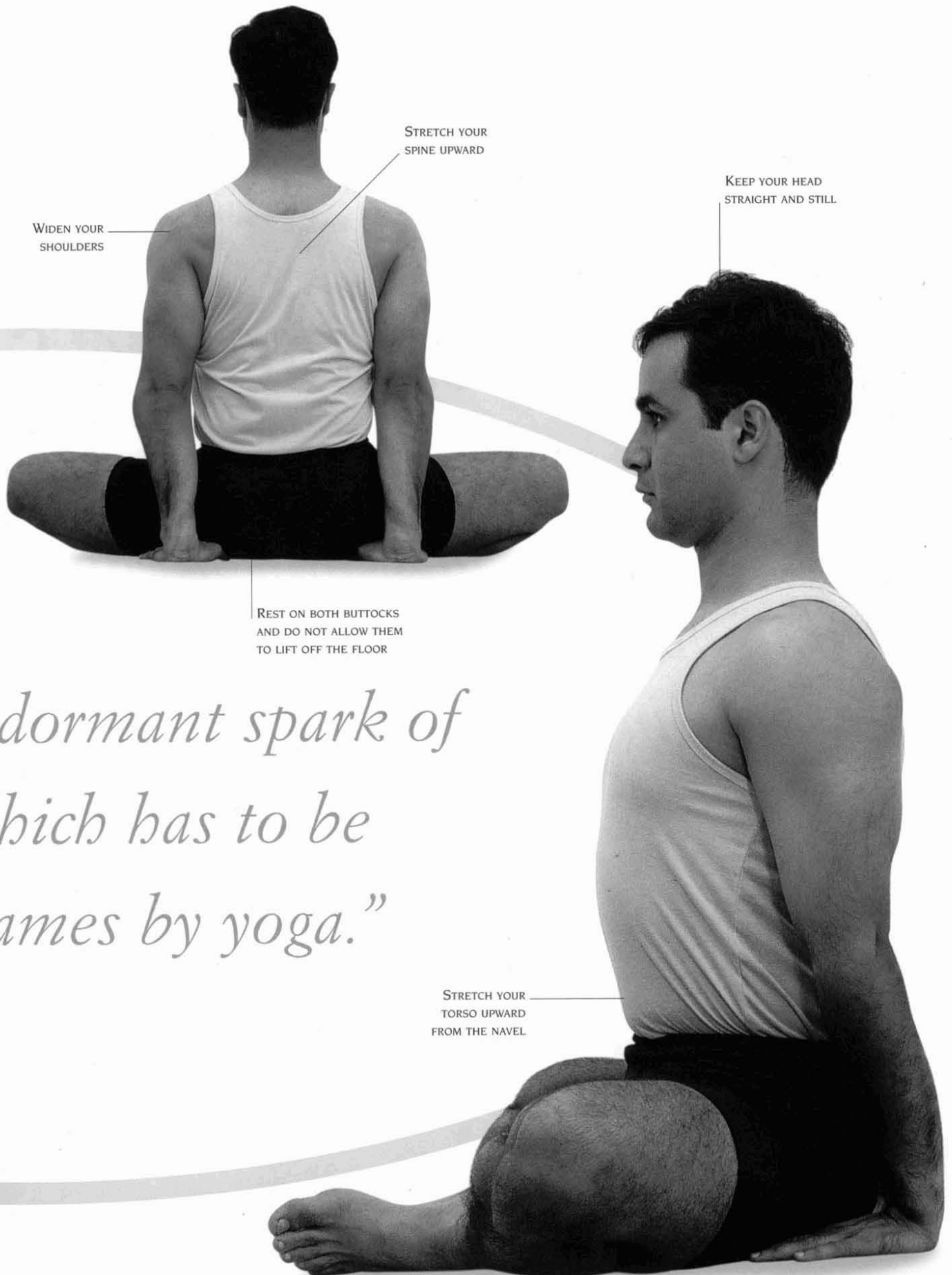
PRESS YOUR THIGH
AND CALF TOGETHER



*“All of us have
divinity in us
fanned into*

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Relax your arms and bring them forward to rest on either side of your body. Raise one knee at a time, then straighten your legs, one by one. Return to Dandasana.



*a dormant spark of
which has to be
flames by yoga."*

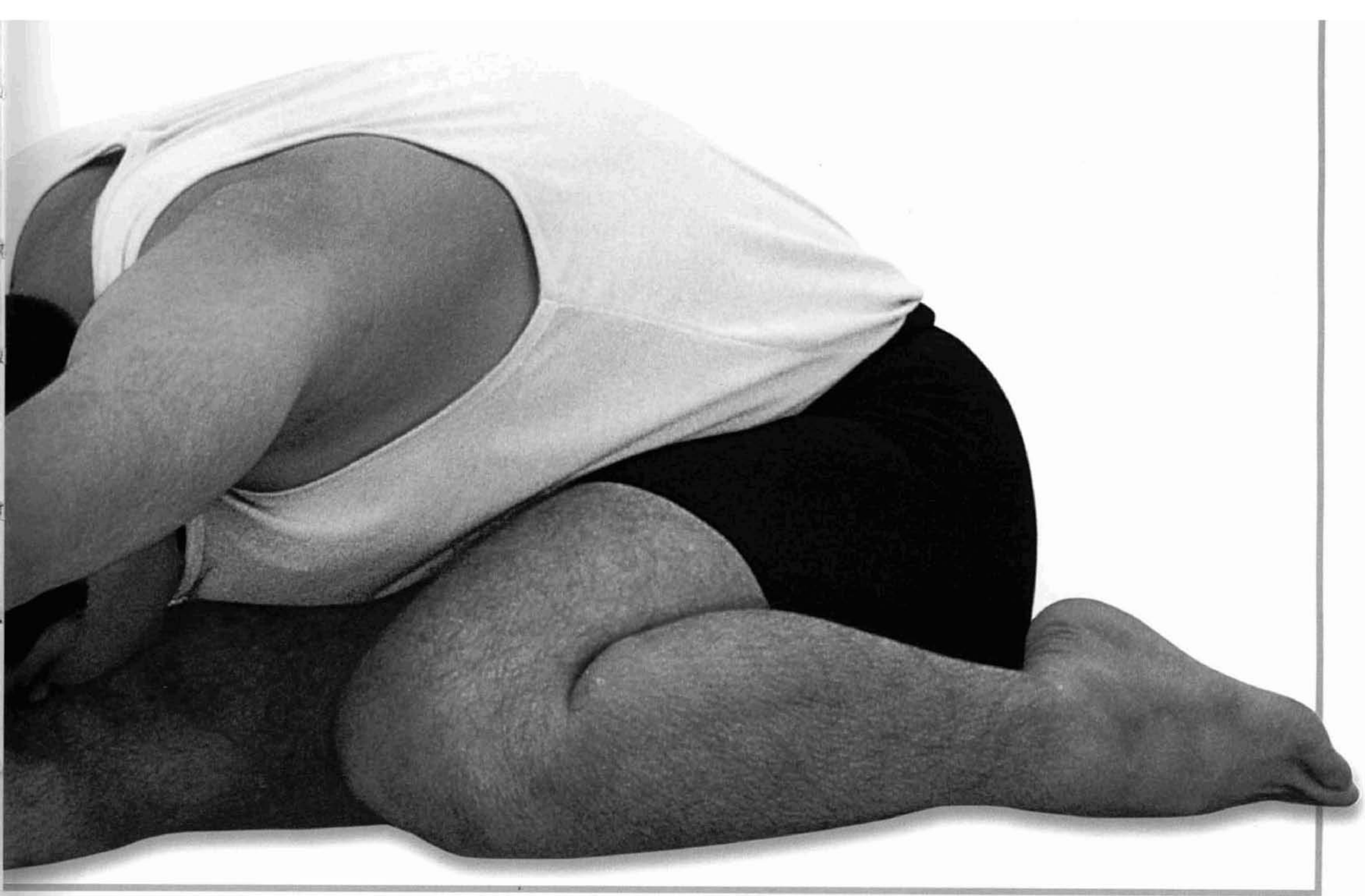
STRETCH YOUR
TORSO UPWARD
FROM THE NAVEL

REST ON BOTH BUTTOCKS
AND DO NOT ALLOW THEM
TO LIFT OFF THE FLOOR

Forward Bends

“Practise asanas by creating space in the muscles and skin, so that the fine network of the body fits into the asana.”





जानु शीर्षासन Janu Sirsasana

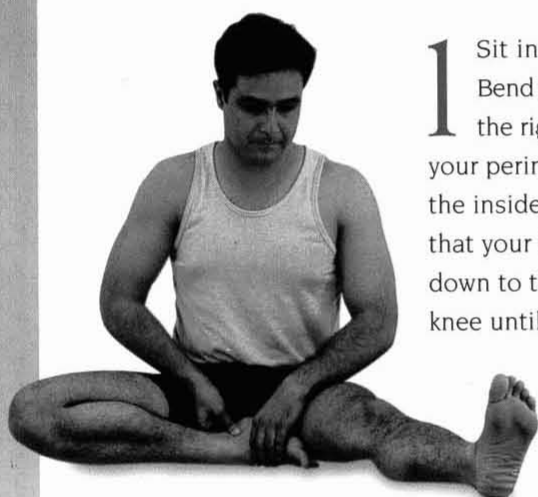
- Head on knee pose -



IN SANSKRIT, THE WORD for “knee” is *janu*, while “head” translates as *sirsa*. Practising this head-on-knee pose has a dynamic impact on the body and has many benefits. It stretches the front of the spine, eases stiffness in the muscles of the legs, and in the hip joints. It increases the flexibility of all the joints of the arms, from the shoulders to the knuckles. Forward bends like Janu Sirsasana rest the frontal brain and heart.

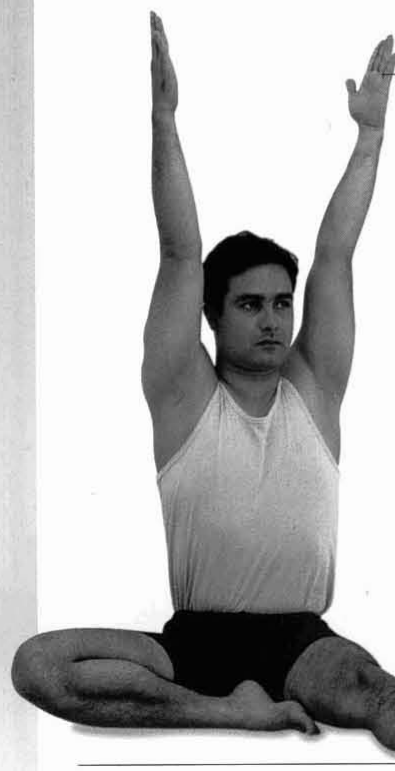
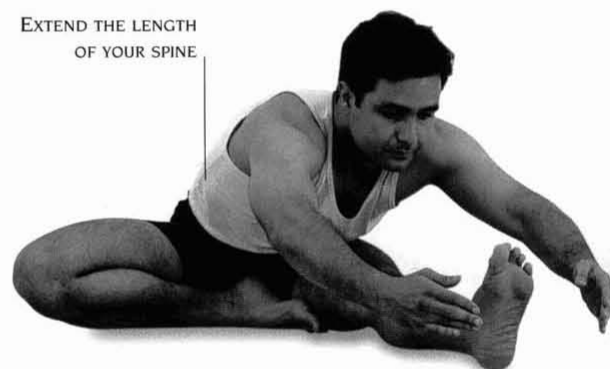
CAUTIONS

To protect your hamstring muscles from damage, always open out the knee of the outstretched leg completely, extending it evenly on all sides. Do not allow the thigh of the same leg to lift off the floor.



1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Bend your right knee and move it to the right. Pull your right foot toward your perineum until the big toe touches the inside of your left thigh. Make sure that your bent knee is pressed firmly down to the floor. Push back the bent knee until the angle between your legs is more than 90°. Keep your left leg straight. It should rest on the exact centre of the left calf.

EXTEND THE LENGTH
OF YOUR SPINE



STRETCH YOUR ARMS
FROM THE ARMPITS
TO THE FINGERTIPS

2 Stretch your left foot so that it feels as if the sole has widened, but keep your toes pointing straight up. Push the right knee even further away from your body. Then, lift your arms straight up above your head, with the palms facing each other. Stretch your torso up from the hips. Continue the stretch through your shoulders and arms.

3 Exhale, and bend forward from your hips, keeping the lower back flat. For a more effective stretch, push your torso down toward your waist to relax the spinal muscles. Stretch your arms toward your left foot and hold the toes.

BEGINNERS If you cannot reach your toes, stretch as far along the leg as you can, holding on to your knee, shin, or ankle. Gradually, with practice, you will learn to stretch each part of your body separately – the buttocks, the back, the ribs, spine, armpits, elbows, and arms. Focus on keeping your left thigh, knee, and calf on the floor. Always press down on your thigh, not on your calf.

BENEFITS

Eases the effects of stress on the heart and the mind

Stabilizes blood pressure

Gradually corrects curvature of the spine and rounded shoulders

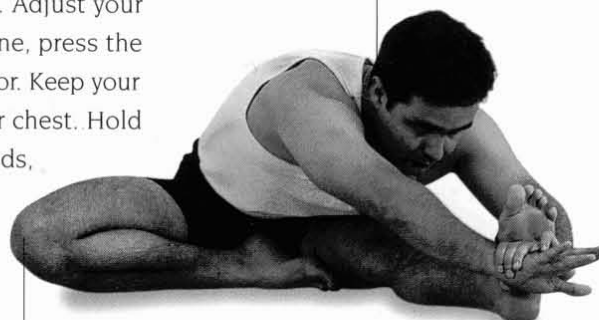
Eases stiffness in the shoulder, hip, elbow, wrist, and finger joints

Tones the abdominal organs

Relieves stiffness in the legs and strengthens the muscles of the legs

4 Now increase the stretch. Exhale and extend your arms beyond your left foot. Hold your right wrist with your left hand. Adjust your position – stretch the spine, press the right knee down to the floor. Keep your arms straight and lift your chest. Hold this position for 15 seconds, breathing evenly.

KEEP YOUR NECK
ELONGATED AND RELAXED

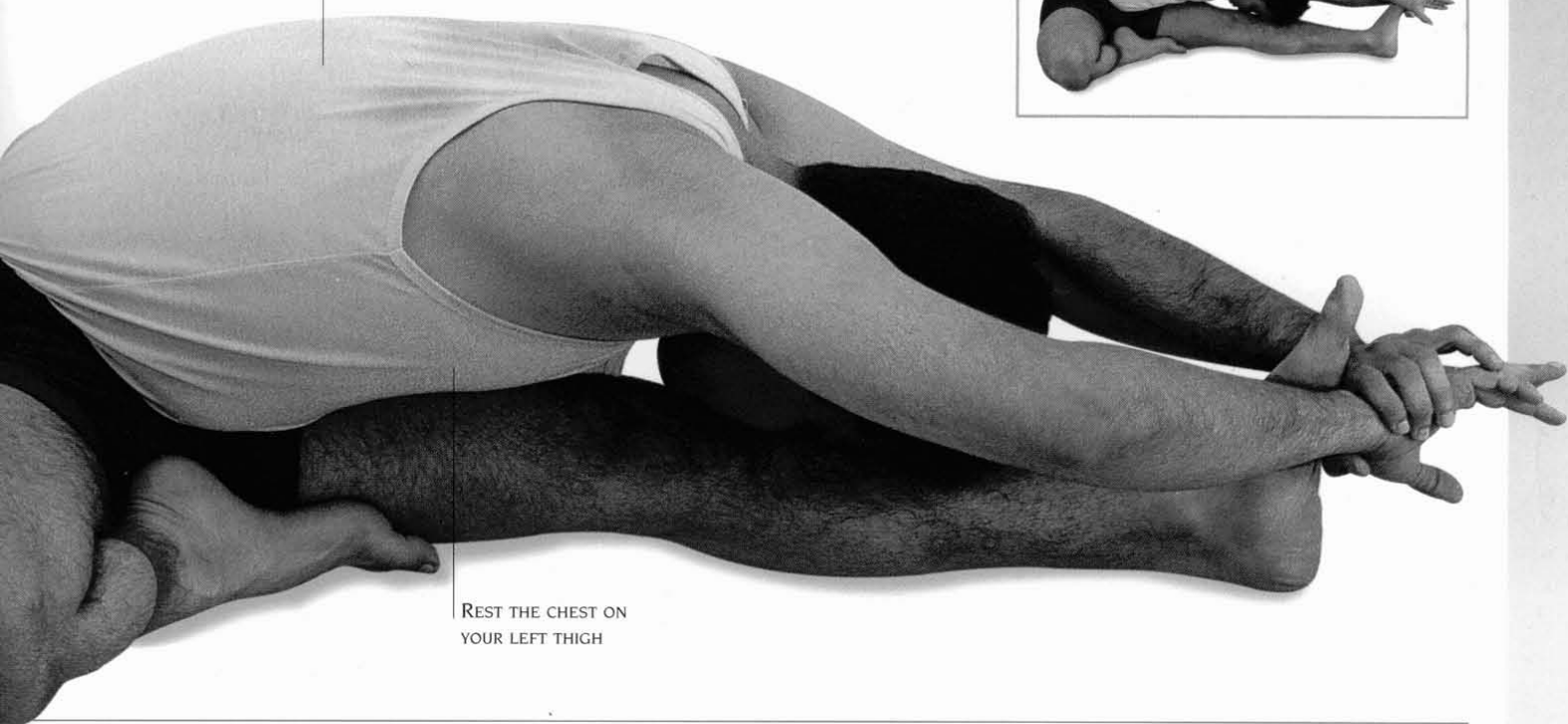


PUSH YOUR RIGHT
KNEE FURTHER BACK

5 Exhale, and stretch your torso further toward the toes. Bring your forehead to your left knee, or as close to it as possible. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds.

INTERMEDIATES Try to rest your nose on your knee, then your lips, and finally, rest your chin on your leg, just beyond the kneecap.

PUSH YOUR TORSO TOWARD
YOUR LEFT FOOT



REST THE CHEST ON
YOUR LEFT THIGH

CORRECTING YOURSELF

When in the final pose, visualize the shape of your back. If it is rounded, as shown here, only a small part of the spine at the level of the shoulders is being stretched. Lengthen and flatten the lower spine and extend your arms out from your shoulder blades.



Janu Sirsasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

When you are holding this pose, your sternum and abdomen should rest on the left thigh as though the leg and torso were one. One side of your back and torso might stretch more than the other – this is usually the same side as the outstretched leg. Be conscious of this, and try to equalize the stretch on both sides. Keep your elbows out, widening them to increase the expansion of your chest.

DO NOT ALLOW THE RIGHT SIDE OF YOUR BACK TO JUT UPWARD



STRETCH THE ARMS FROM THE ARMPITS



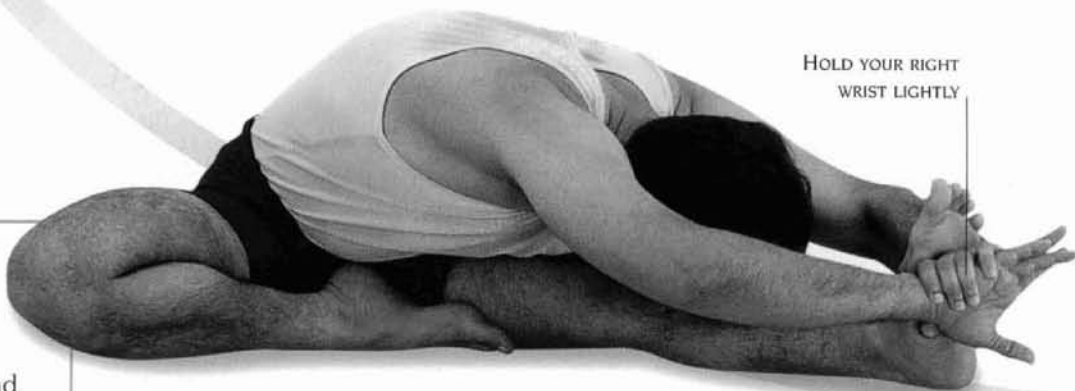
PRESS YOUR KNEE TO THE FLOOR

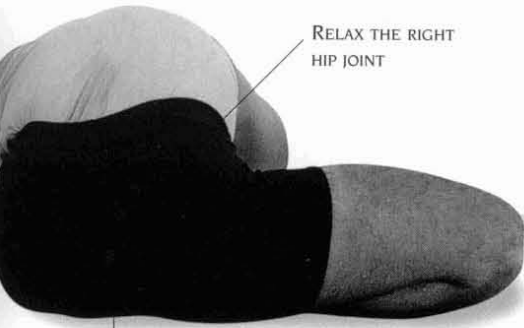
*“The intensi
increase an
momen*

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Inhale, then lift your head and torso slightly. After a few seconds, release your hands and sit up. Stretch out your right leg and sit in Dandasana. Now repeat the pose on the other side.

HOLD YOUR RIGHT WRIST LIGHTLY





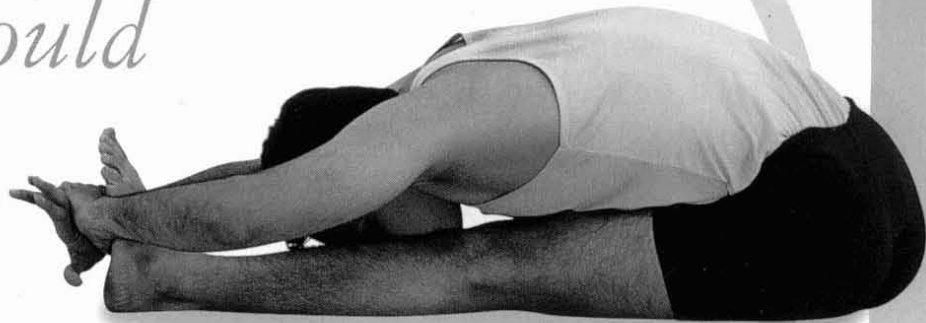
RELAX THE RIGHT
HIP JOINT

KEEP BOTH BUTTOCKS
ON THE FLOOR



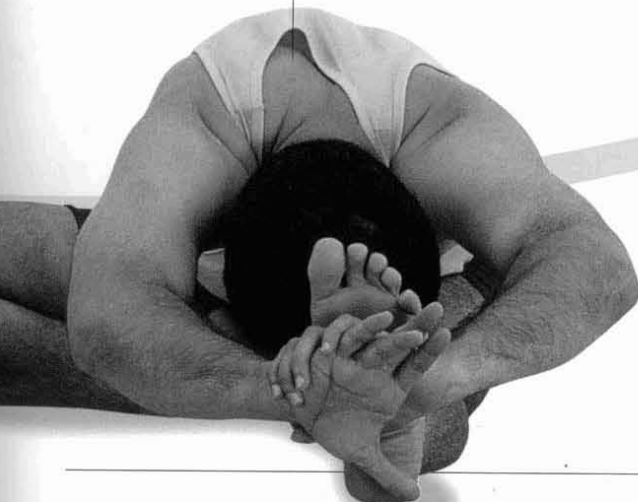
FLATTEN THE SMALL OF
THE BACK - DO NOT
LET IT CURVE

*of the stretch should
rejuvenate from
to moment."*



PUSH YOUR TORSO
TOWARD THE LEFT FOOT

KEEP YOUR FOOT
POINTED UP - DO NOT
ALLOW IT TO TILT



RELAX THE BACK OF
THE KNEE AND KEEP
IT ON THE FLOOR

त्र्यंग मुखैकपाद पश्चिमोत्तानासन

Trianga Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana

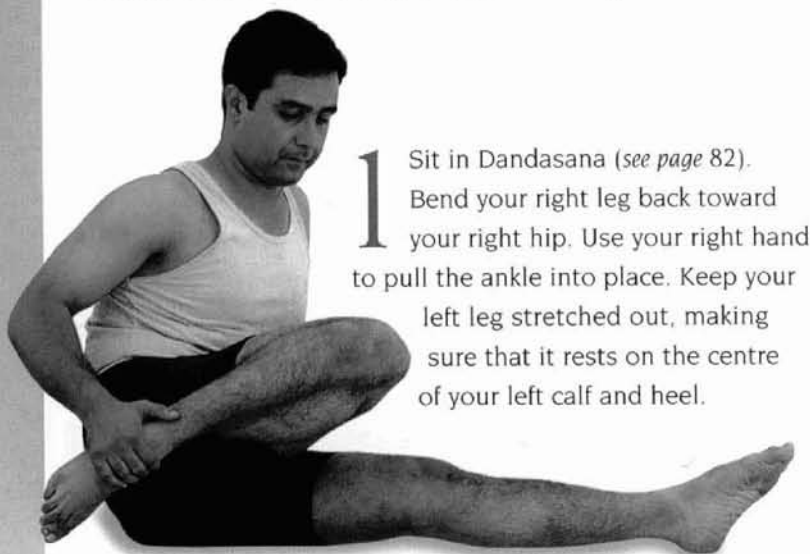
- Three parts of the body stretch -



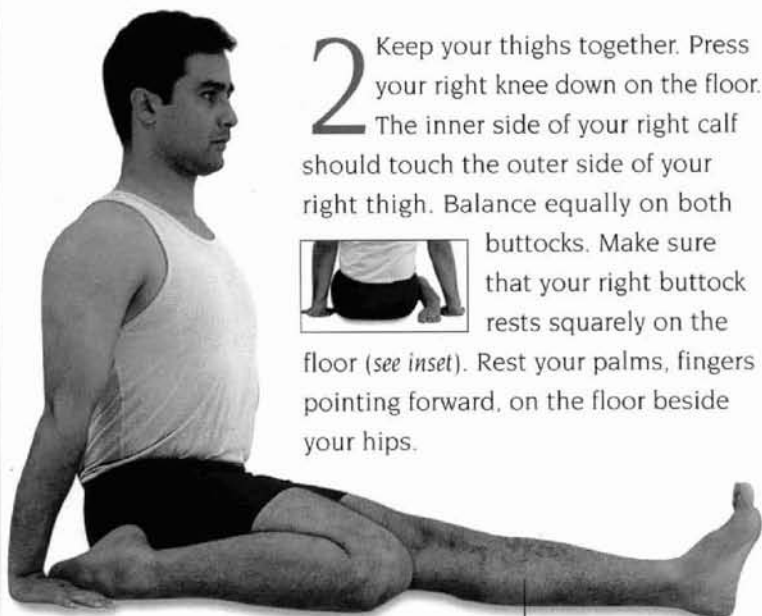
IN SANSKRIT, the literal meaning of *trianga* is "three parts of the body". In this asana, the "three parts" comprise the buttocks, knees, and feet. The back of the body, which is known in Sanskrit as the *paschima* or "west", is stretched over *eka pada* or "one foot", and the *mukha* or "face" rests on the leg. Regular practice of this asana makes the whole body supple and agile.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana during, or immediately after, an asthmatic attack. Avoid this asana if you have diarrhoea. Do not twist your torso or allow it to lean toward the outer side of your extended leg, as this could strain your spine or abdominal organs.



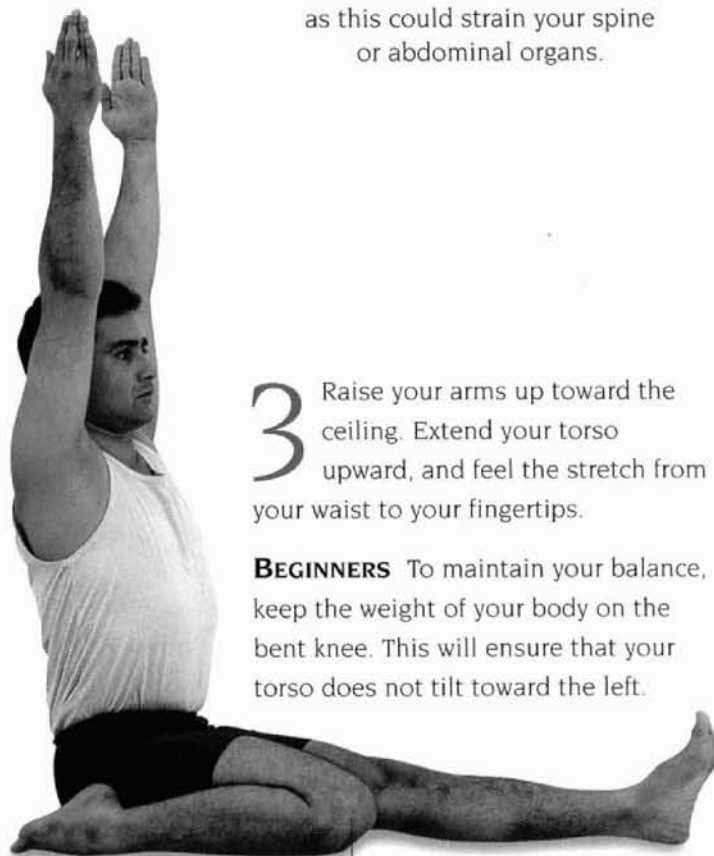
1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Bend your right leg back toward your right hip. Use your right hand to pull the ankle into place. Keep your left leg stretched out, making sure that it rests on the centre of your left calf and heel.



2 Keep your thighs together. Press your right knee down on the floor. The inner side of your right calf should touch the outer side of your right thigh. Balance equally on both buttocks. Make sure that your right buttock rests squarely on the floor (see inset). Rest your palms, fingers pointing forward, on the floor beside your hips.



STRETCH THE BACK OF YOUR LEFT LEG FROM THIGH TO HEEL



3 Raise your arms up toward the ceiling. Extend your torso upward, and feel the stretch from your waist to your fingertips.

BEGINNERS To maintain your balance, keep the weight of your body on the bent knee. This will ensure that your torso does not tilt toward the left.

PUSH DOWN ON YOUR BENT KNEE

STRAIGHTEN AND STRETCH YOUR TOES

PUSH YOUR
TORSO FORWARD

STRETCH YOUR ARMS
AND LOCK YOUR ELBOWS

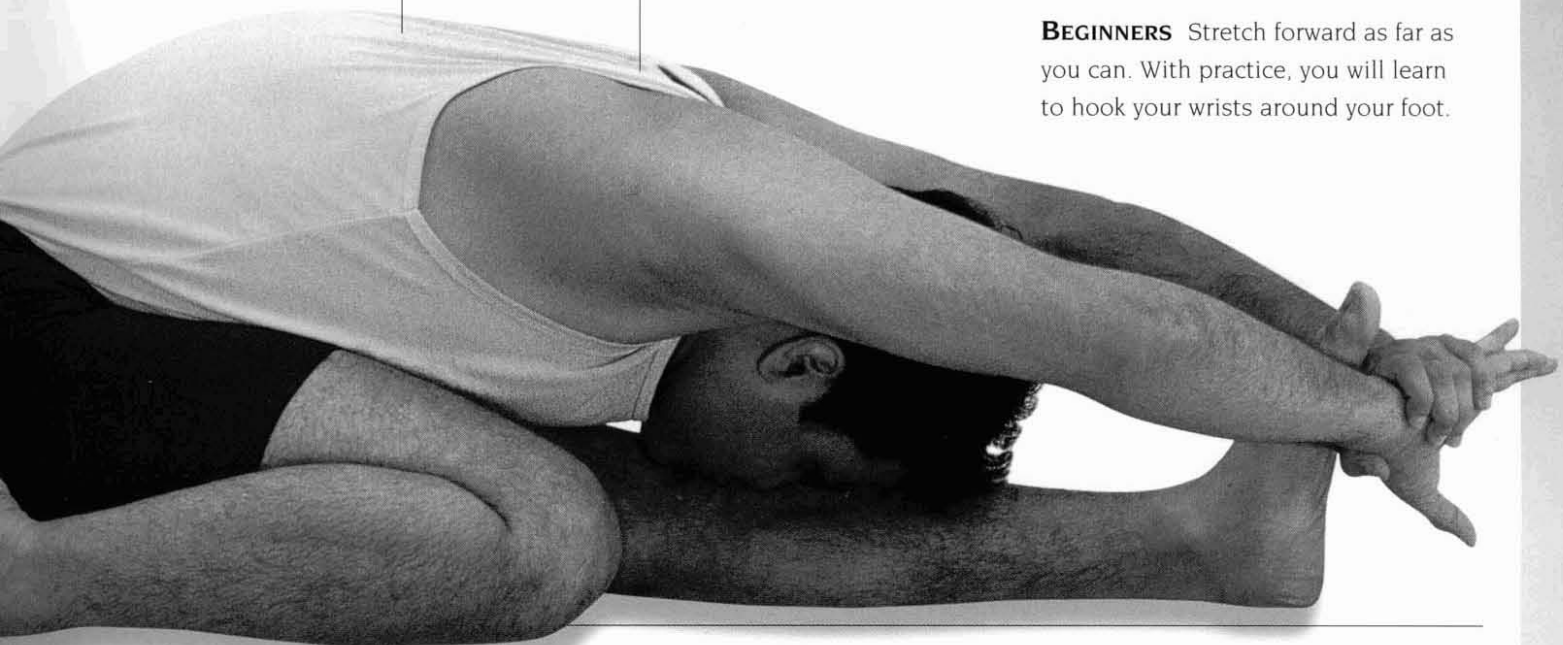


4 Exhale, and bend forward from the waist. Stretch both arms beyond your left foot, with the palms facing each other. Ensure your thighs and knees are pressed together. Rest on both buttocks – the essence of the pose is getting this balance right.

INTERMEDIATES While you are getting into the pose, the torso has a tendency to tilt to the left. To guard against this, shift your weight to your right side. This will bring the centre of gravity to the middle of your right thigh. Then, equalize your weight on both buttocks.

DO NOT LET YOUR TORSO
TILT TO THE LEFT

EXTEND YOUR
SHOULDERS AND KEEP
YOUR NECK RELAXED



BENEFITS

◆
Tones and stimulates the
abdominal organs

◆
Assists digestion and counters
the effects of excess bile secretion

◆
Reduces flatulence and constipation

◆
Creates flexibility in the knee joints

◆
Corrects dropped arches
and flat feet

5 Exhale, widen your elbows, and push your torso toward your left foot. Press both your wrists against the sole of your left foot, then hold your right wrist with your left hand. First, touch your forehead to your left knee, then place your nose and lips, and finally, your chin, beyond your left knee. Push your left buttock out and rest on the inside of your left buttock bone. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds.

BEGINNERS Stretch forward as far as you can. With practice, you will learn to hook your wrists around your foot.

त्र्यंग मुखैकपाद पश्चिमोत्तानासन

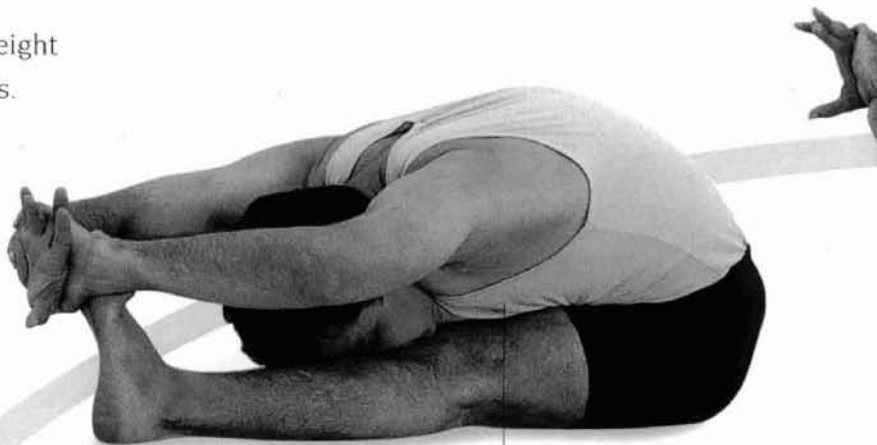
Trianga Mukhaikapada Paschimottanasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

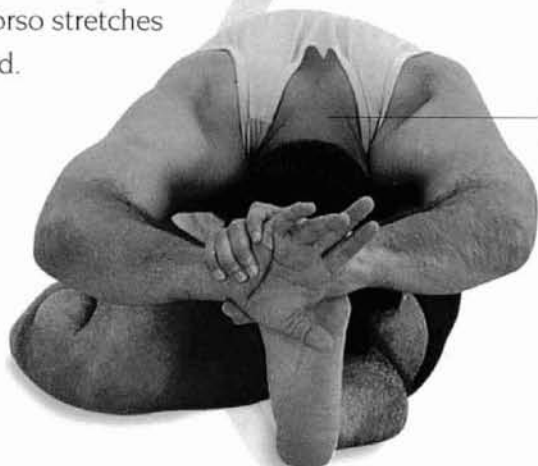
In the final stretch, make sure that your body weight is distributed evenly over your legs and buttocks.

Keep your sternum in contact with your thighs. Both arms should be equally stretched forward.

Make sure that the weight on the knee of the outstretched leg is equal to the weight borne by the bent knee. Focus on maintaining the centre of gravity of this pose at the middle of the right thigh. Extend the right side of your torso from the pelvic rim toward your head. Elongate the right side of your chest and waist, and expand the side of the ribs resting on your bent knee, so that your torso stretches further forward.



REST YOUR STERNUM
ON YOUR THIGHS



KEEP THE MUSCLES
OF YOUR NECK SOFT

*"A yogi's brain
bottom of the
of his"*

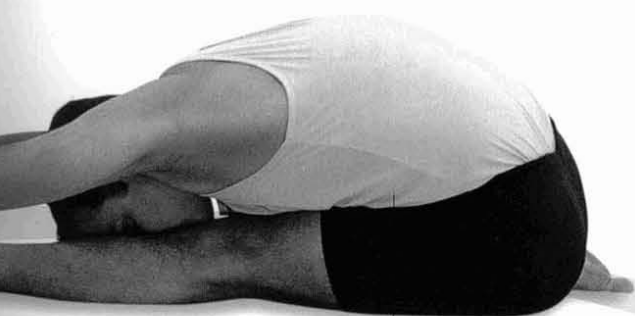


POINT YOUR TOES
STRAIGHT UPWARD

COMING OUT OF
THE POSE

◆
Inhale, raise your head and torso, and wait for a few seconds. Keep your back concave. Release your hands, then sit up and straighten your right leg. Repeat the pose on the other side. Return to Dandasana.

ENSURE THAT YOUR
BENT KNEE REMAINS
PRESSED TO THE FLOOR



PUSH YOUR WAIST TOWARD
THE QUADRICEP MUSCLES
OF YOUR THIGHS

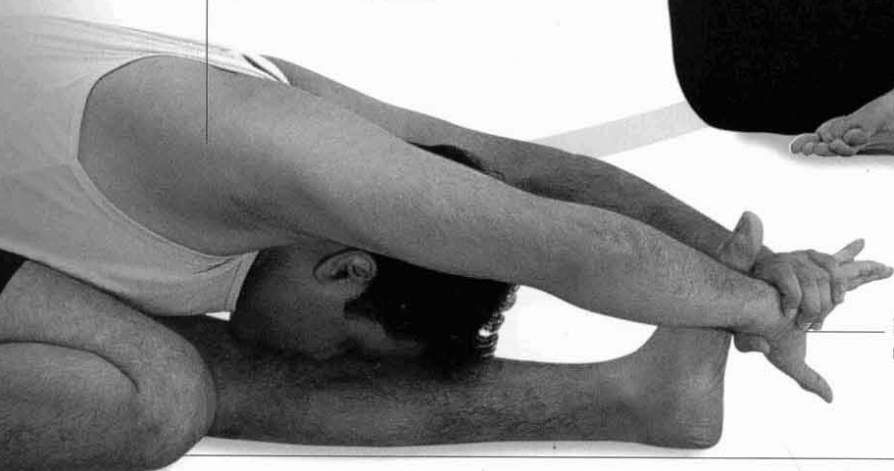


PRESS YOUR INNER THIGHS
DOWN ON THE FLOOR



KEEP BOTH HIPS
PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER

*extends from the
foot to the top
head."*



STRETCH BOTH ARMS
EVENLY FROM THE ARMPITS



REST ON THE
CENTRE OF YOUR HEEL

PRESS BOTH WRISTS
FIRMLY AGAINST YOUR SOLES

पश्चिमोत्तानासन

Paschimottanasana

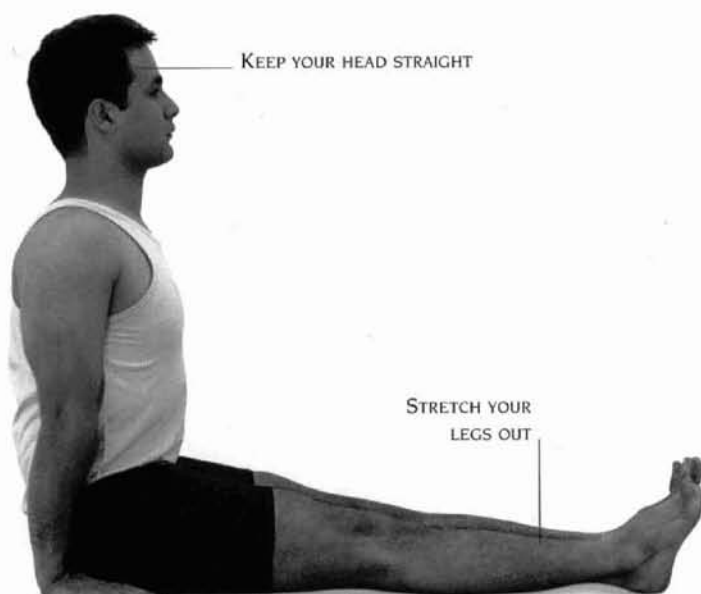
- Intense back stretch -



THE BACK OF YOUR BODY, from your heels to your head, is known as *paschim*, which means "west" in Sanskrit. *Ut* indicates "intense", while *tan* means "stretch". This asana stretches the length of your spine, allowing the life-force to flow to every part of your body. Resting your forehead on your knees, calms the active front brain, and keeps the meditative back brain quiet, yet alert.

CAUTIONS

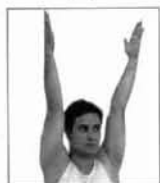
Do not practise this asana during, or just after, an asthmatic attack. Avoid this pose if you have diarrhoea. Do not allow your thighs to lift off the floor, as the muscles at the backs of your knees might rupture.



KEEP YOUR HEAD STRAIGHT

STRETCH YOUR
LEGS OUT

1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Keep your legs together. Stretch your heels, ensuring that both are evenly pressed down. Put your palms



on the floor beside your hips. Take a few deep breaths. Now, stretch your arms above your head (see inset), with the palms facing each other. Stretch your spine upward.

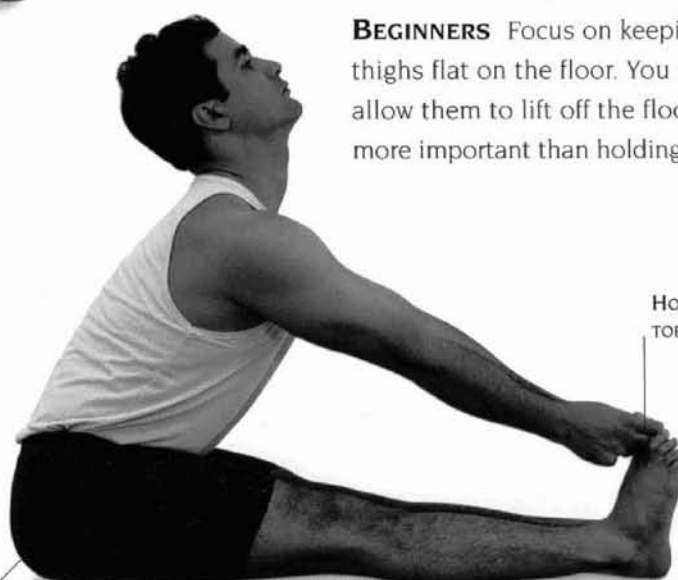
2 Exhale, and stretch your arms toward your feet. Grip the big toe of your left foot with the thumb and first two fingers of your left hand.



Do the same to your right toe with your right hand (see inset). Press

your thighs down on the floor. The pressure on your thighs should be greater than that on your calves. This helps you stretch more effectively.

BEGINNERS Focus on keeping your thighs flat on the floor. You must not allow them to lift off the floor. This is more important than holding your toes.



HOLD YOUR
TOES FIRMLY

DO NOT RAISE THE
BUTTOCK BONES
OFF THE FLOOR

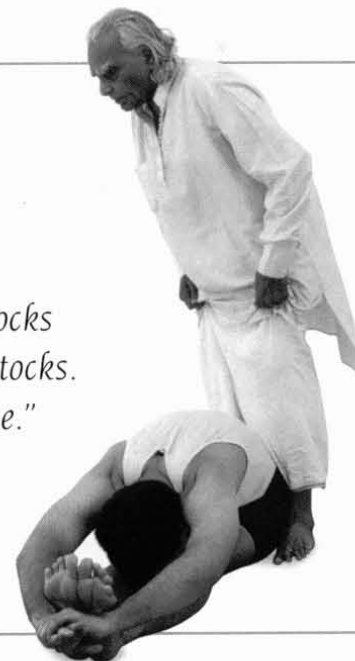
PRESS YOUR SHINS AND
THIGHS FIRMLY ON THE FLOOR

BENEFITS

- ◆ Rests and massages the heart
- ◆ Soothes the adrenal glands
- ◆ Tones the kidneys, bladder, and pancreas
- ◆ Activates a sluggish liver, and improves the digestive system
- ◆ Helps to treat impotence
- ◆ Stimulates the ovaries, uterus, and the entire reproductive system

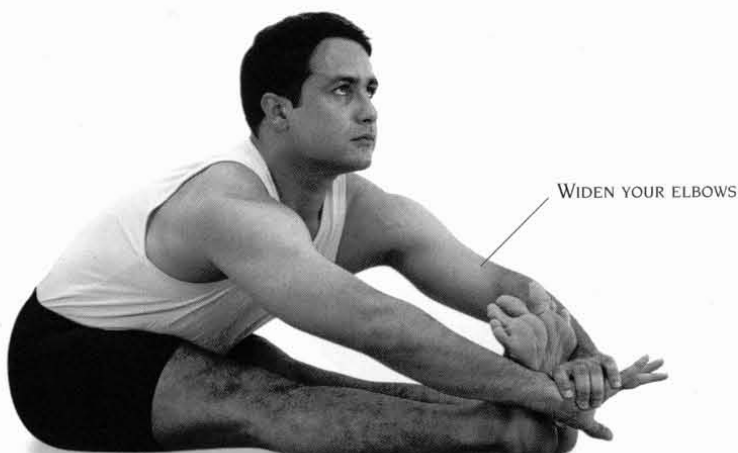
THE GURU'S ADVICE

"Stretch from the seat of the buttocks and feel the lightness in your buttocks. This is the heart of the perfect pose."

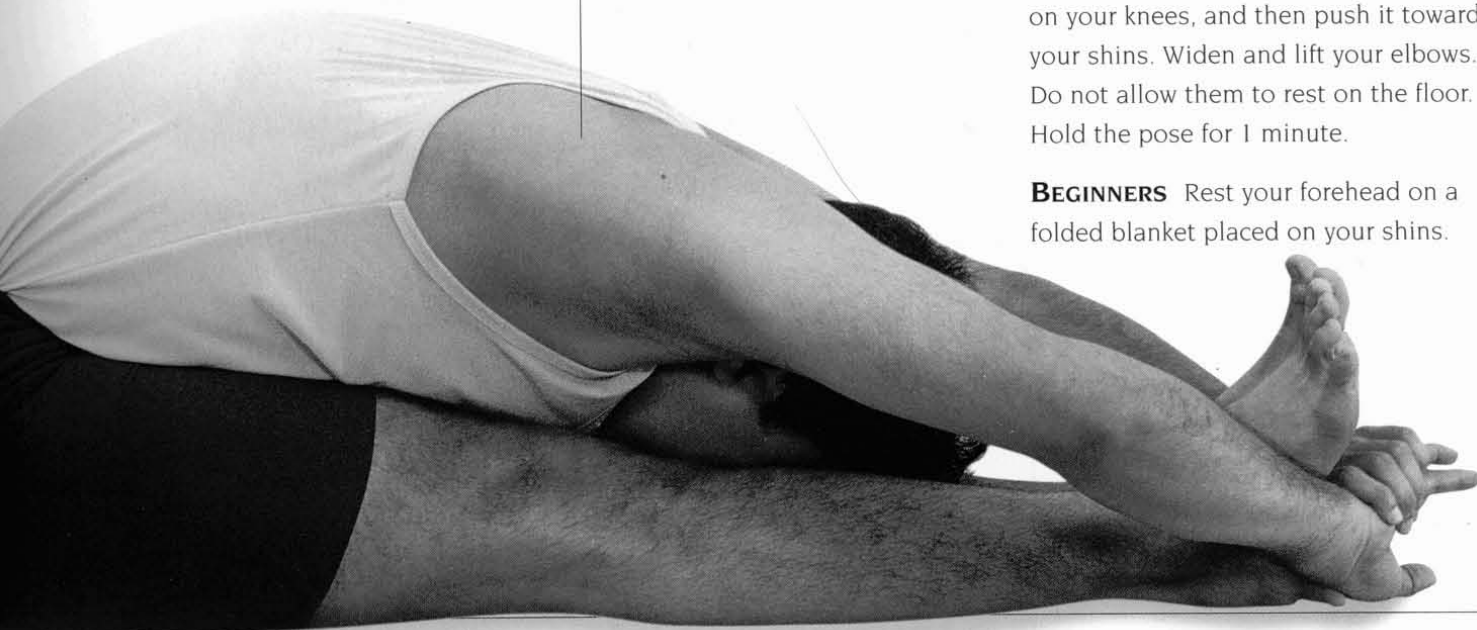


3 Make sure that you are sitting on your inner buttock bones and that your weight is distributed equally on them. Do not allow either buttock to rise off the floor. Then, hold your right wrist with your left hand.

INTERMEDIATES Hold the soles of your feet with the interlocked fingers of both hands. Breathe evenly.



STRETCH YOUR ARMS FROM YOUR SHOULDER BLADES



4 Exhale, and lift your torso. Bend forward from your lower back, keeping your spine concave.

Stretch forward from both sides of the waist. First, place your forehead firmly on your knees, and then push it toward your shins. Widen and lift your elbows. Do not allow them to rest on the floor. Hold the pose for 1 minute.

BEGINNERS Rest your forehead on a folded blanket placed on your shins.

Paschimottanasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

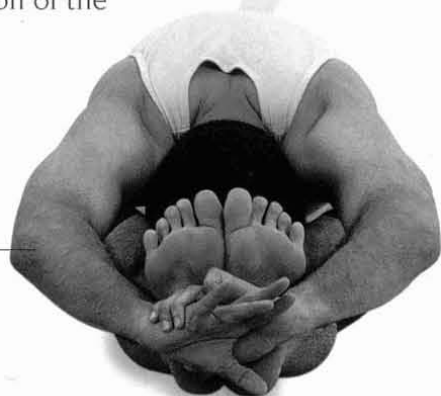
As you bend, keep your diaphragm as soft as dough. For a more effective stretch, bring your diaphragm closer to your chest as you lower your head. The front of your chest is the “brain” of this pose (see page 45). Bring it close to your thighs. Check that both sides of your chest are evenly stretched, so that there is a symmetry in the final pose. Press your forehead on your shins. Consciously descend your mind into the pose. Focus on your back – extend the skin of your back toward your head. Descend your spine completely. This will bring lightness and calm to the brain. Rejuvenate the stretch constantly. With practice, increase the duration of the pose to 5 minutes.

KEEP THE MUSCLES
OF YOUR NECK PASSIVE

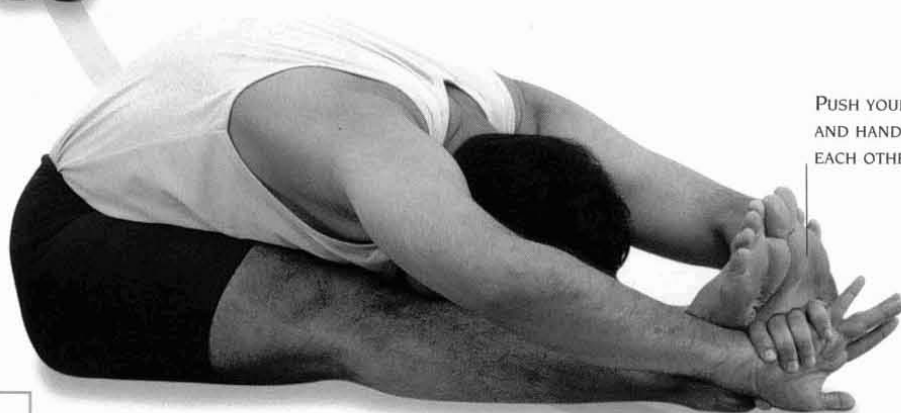


*“The movement of
intelligence of the
and keep pace*

DO NOT LET YOUR
ELBOWS MOVE DOWN



PUSH YOUR FEET
AND HANDS AGAINST
EACH OTHER



COMING OUT OF THE POSE

◆
Inhale, then raise your head and torso, keeping your back concave. Wait for a few seconds, then release your hands. Sit up and come back to Dandasana.



ENSURE THAT YOUR
KNEES AND THIGHS DO
NOT LIFT OFF THE FLOOR

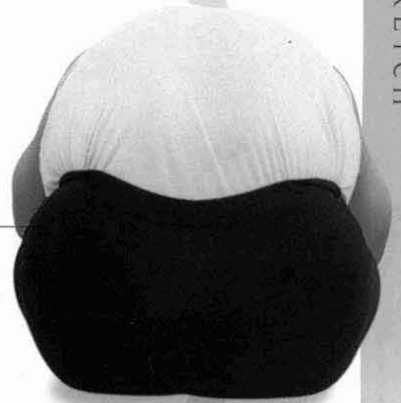
KEEP YOUR SPINE STRETCHED

RAISE THE INNER SIDES
OF YOUR UPPER ARMS



*the body and the
brain should synchronize
with each other."*

COMPRESS YOUR HIPS
AND KEEP THEM
PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER

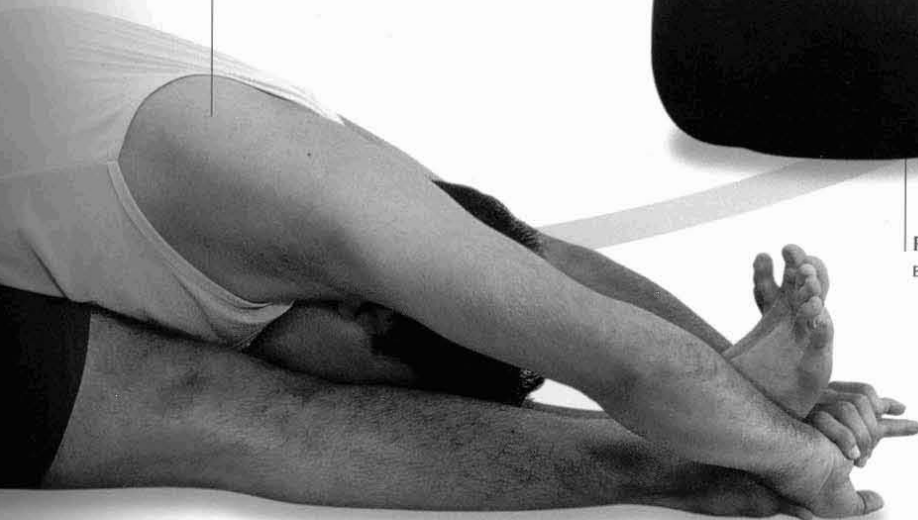


STRETCH FORWARD
FROM THE BASE
OF YOUR SPINE

KEEP YOUR ARMPITS
ACTIVE AND STRETCH
THEM FORWARD



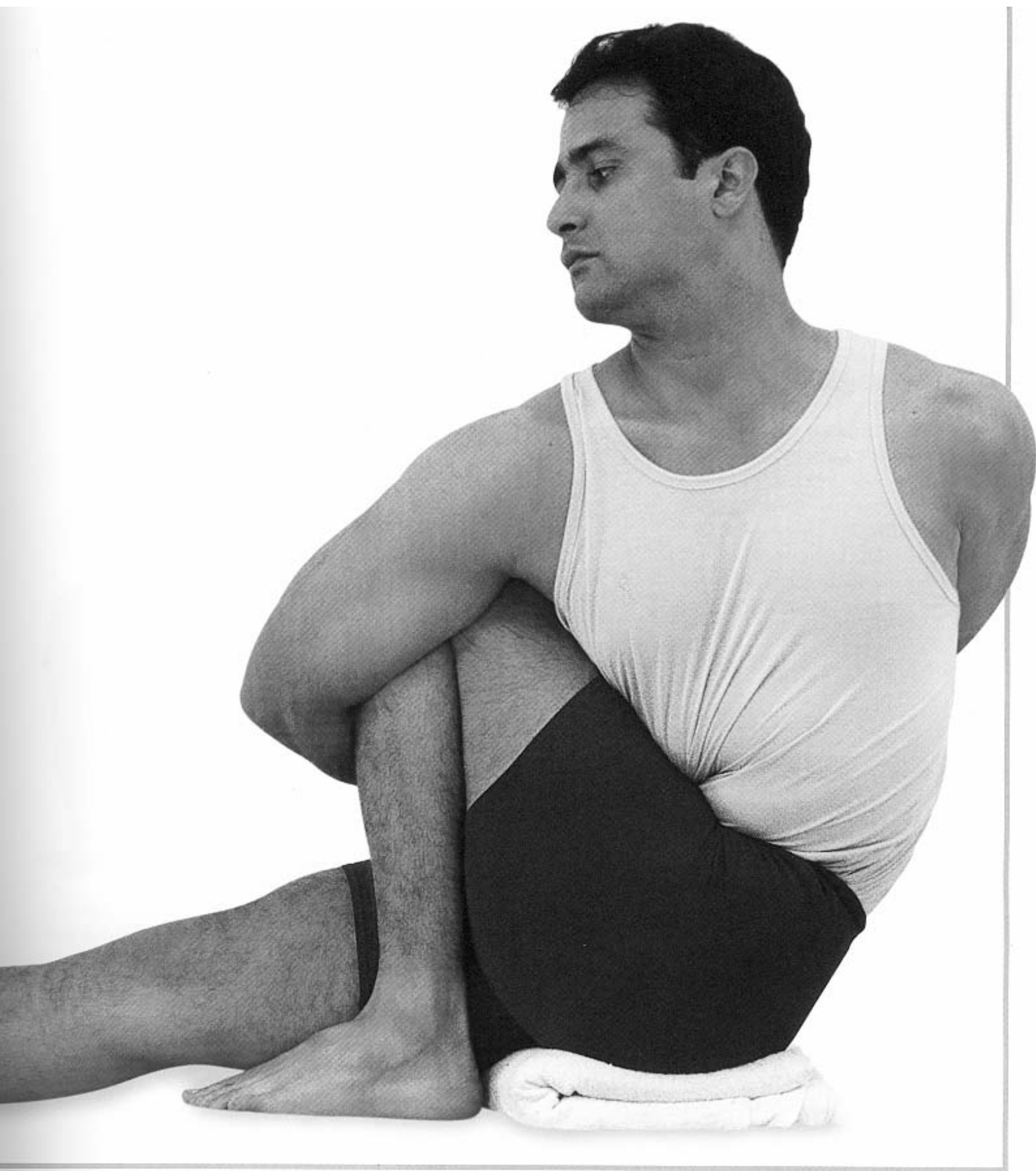
REST ON BOTH
BUTTOCKS EQUALLY



Twists

“If you practise yoga every day with perseverance, you will be able to face the turmoil of life with steadiness and maturity.”





भरद्वाजासन

Bharadvajasana

- Torso stretch -



THIS ASANA IS NAMED after the ancient sage Bharadvaja, who was the father of the great warrior Dronacharya. Both are major characters in the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*. Regular practice of this asana teaches you to rotate your spinal column effectively, which increases the flexibility of your back and torso, and prepares you for the more advanced twists. It also massages, tones, and rejuvenates your abdominal organs.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have high blood pressure, eye strain, a stress-related headache, or migraine. The asana should not be attempted if you have diarrhoea or dysentery. Avoid this asana during menstruation.

1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Place your palms flat on the floor behind your buttocks, with your fingers pointing forward. Bend your knees, and with your legs together, move your shins to the left. Make sure that your thighs and knees are facing forward. Breathe evenly.

KEEP YOUR
FEET RELAXED

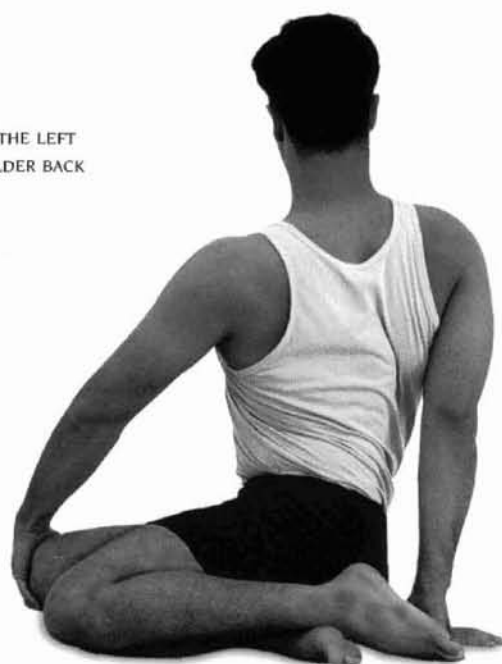
DO NOT MOVE
YOUR HEAD

TAKE THE LEFT
SHOULDER BACK

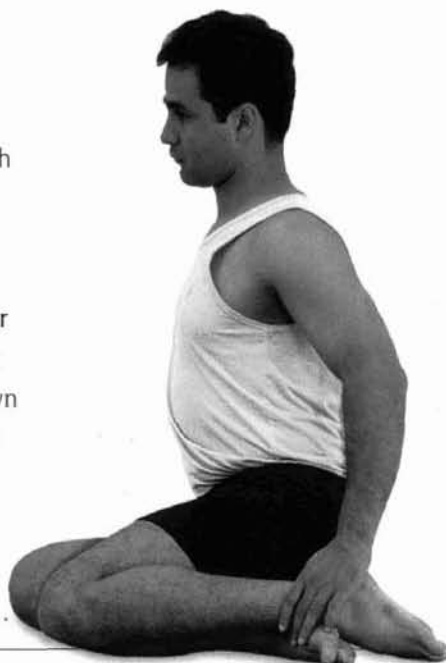
2 Hold your ankles and bring your shins further to the left, until both feet are beside your left hip. The front of your left ankle should rest on the arch of your right foot (see inset).



Extend the toes of your left foot and keep your right ankle pressed down to the floor. Rest your buttocks on the floor, not on your feet. Lift your torso, so that your spine is fully stretched upward. Pause for a few breaths.



3 Exhale, then turn your chest and abdomen to the right, so that your left shoulder moves forward to the right, and your right shoulder moves back. Place your left palm on your right knee and rest your right palm on the floor. Revolve your right shoulder blade to the back and tuck in your left shoulder blade. Take one or two breaths.



BENEFITS

◆
*Relieves pain in the neck, shoulders,
and back*

◆
*Helps to keep the spine
and shoulders supple*

◆
*Eases a painful, stiff, sprained,
or fused lumbar spine*

◆
*Reduces discomfort
in the dorsal spine area*

◆
*Increases the flexibility of the back
and hips*

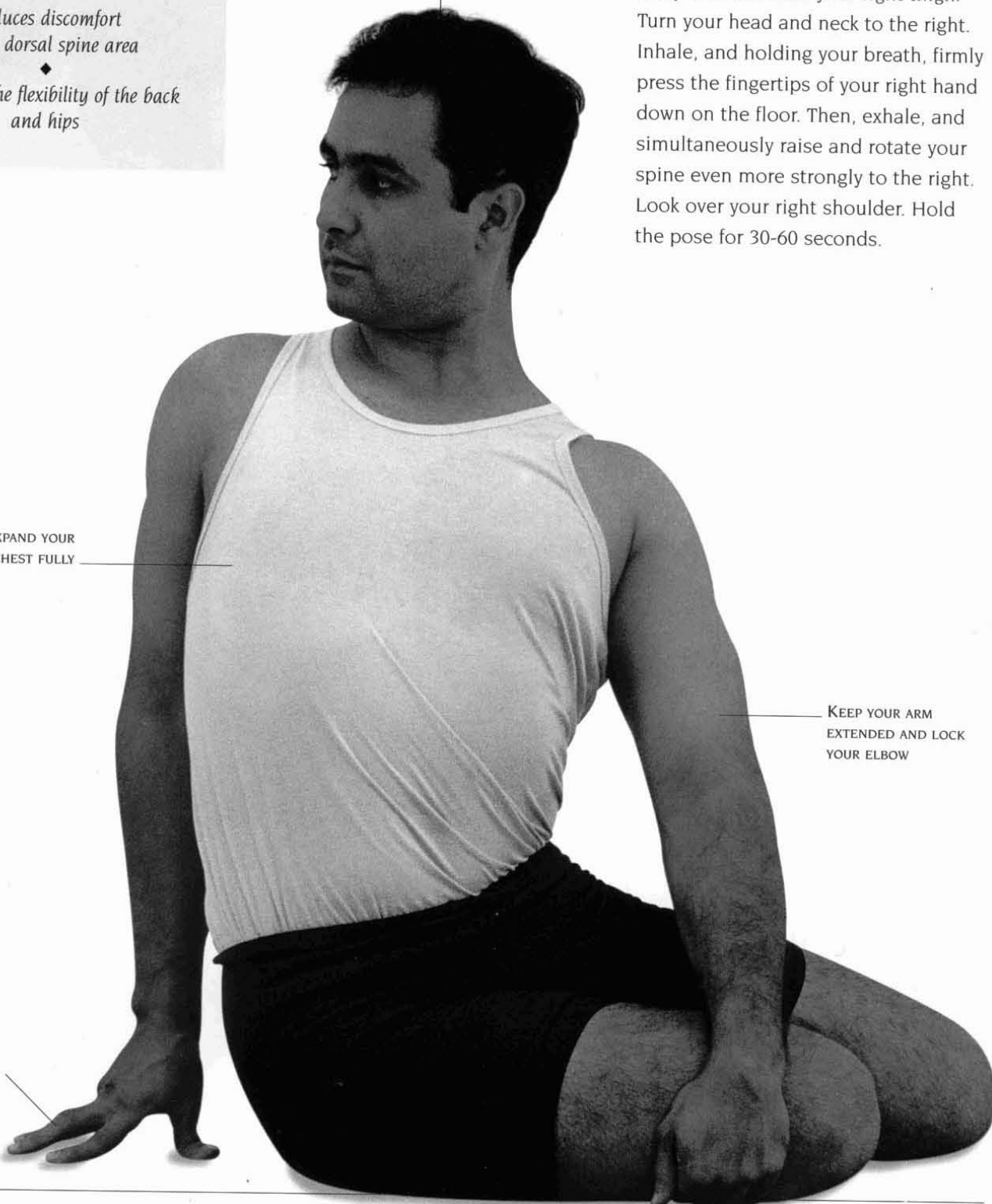
TURN YOUR HEAD
TO THE RIGHT

4 Press your right shin to the floor. This will help to lift your torso and turn it even further to the right. Rotate, until the left side of your body is in line with your right thigh. Turn your head and neck to the right. Inhale, and holding your breath, firmly press the fingertips of your right hand down on the floor. Then, exhale, and simultaneously raise and rotate your spine even more strongly to the right. Look over your right shoulder. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds.

EXPAND YOUR
CHEST FULLY

KEEP YOUR ARM
EXTENDED AND LOCK
YOUR ELBOW

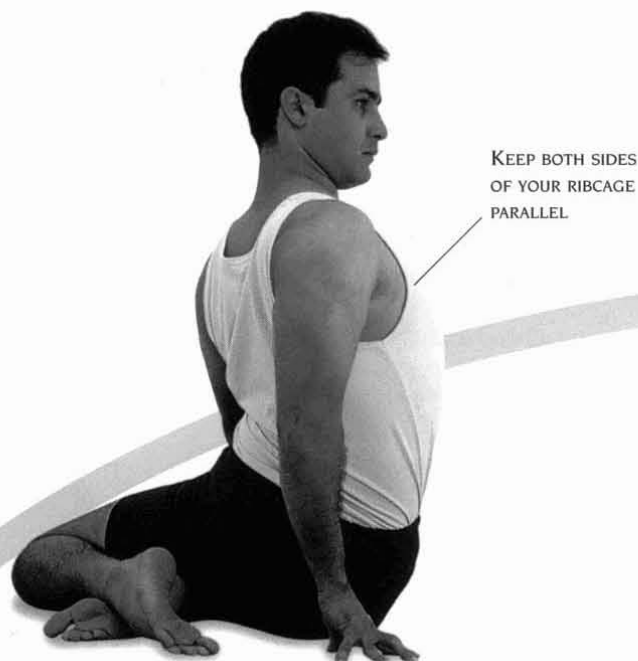
PRESS YOUR
FINGERTIPS TO
THE FLOOR



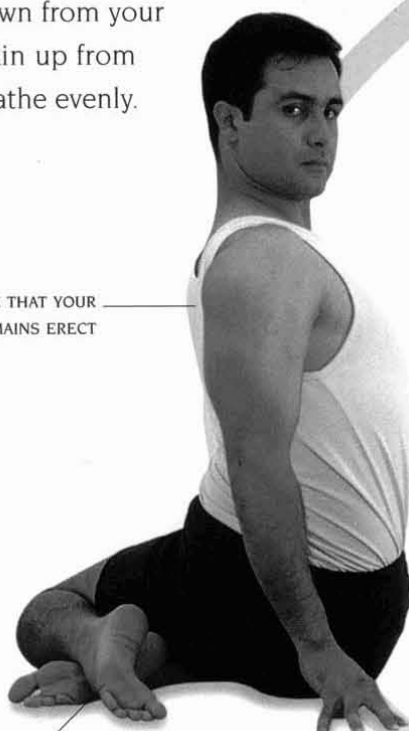
Bharadvajasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

Once you have turned your neck and head to the right and rotated your torso, tuck in both your shoulders. Lift your sternum, keeping the spine erect as it turns on its axis. Do not change the position of your knees while turning, as they tend to move with the body. Ensure that your body does not lean back. Maintain the turn of your head and neck to the right. Keep the left hip and the left shoulder in line when you revolve your torso. Twist the spine strongly, turning it as far to the right as you can. Focus on the skin of your back. Try, consciously, to push your skin down from your neck, and pull the skin up from your lower back. Breathe evenly.

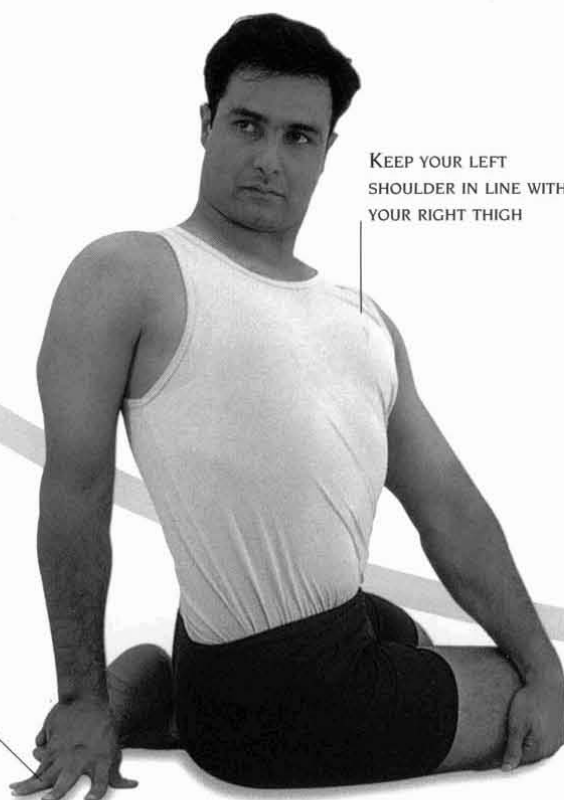


ENSURE THAT YOUR
SPINE REMAINS ERECT



REST YOUR LEFT FOOT
ON THE ARCH OF
THE RIGHT FOOT

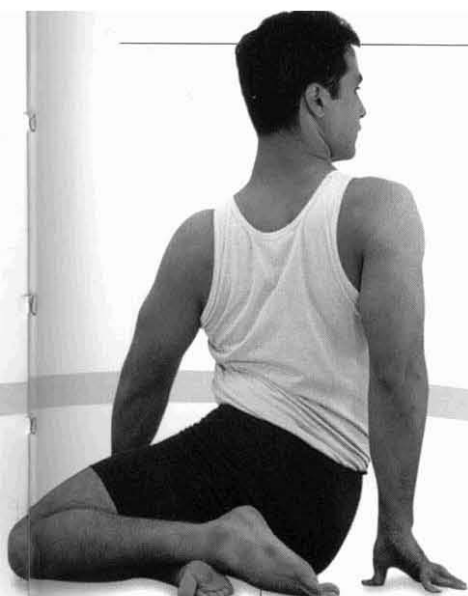
KEEP YOUR LEFT
SHOULDER IN LINE WITH
YOUR RIGHT THIGH



STRETCH THE
FINGERS OUT FULLY

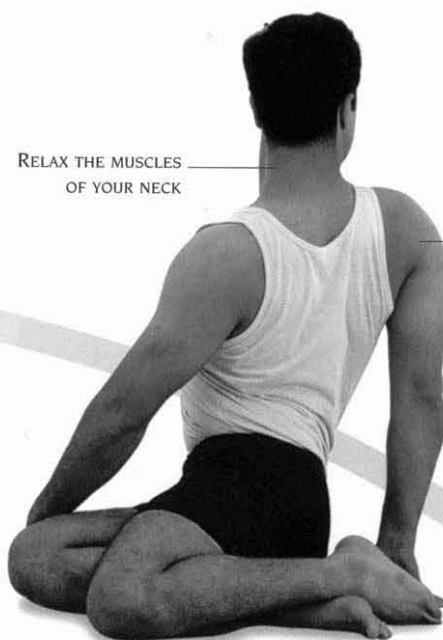
COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Release your hands and bring your torso to the front. Straighten your legs. Repeat the pose on the other side. Come back to Dandasana.



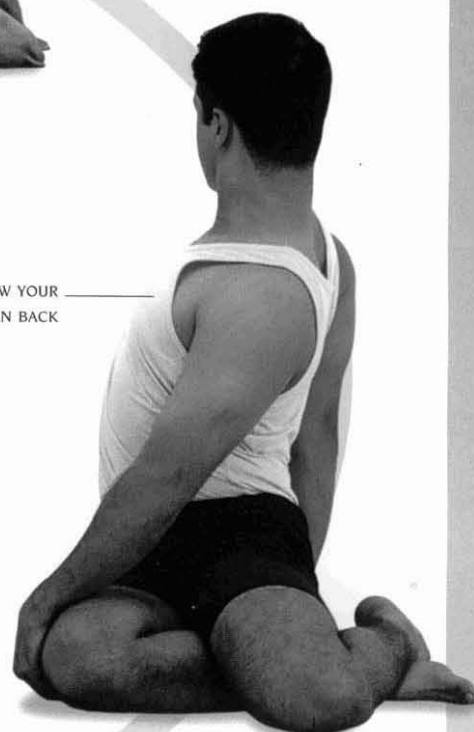
REST BOTH FEET
ON THE FLOOR

RELAX THE MUSCLES
OF YOUR NECK



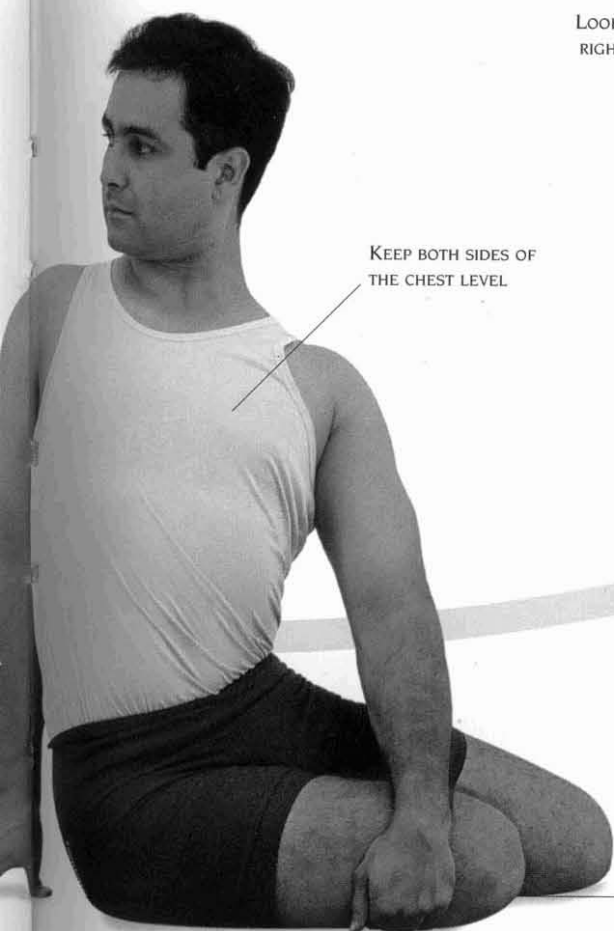
TUCK IN YOUR RIGHT
SHOULDER BLADE

DO NOT ALLOW YOUR
TORSO TO LEAN BACK



LOOK OVER YOUR
RIGHT SHOULDER

KEEP BOTH SIDES OF
THE CHEST LEVEL



PRESS YOUR KNEES
DOWN AND KEEP THEM
FACING FORWARD



मरीच्यासन

Marichyasana

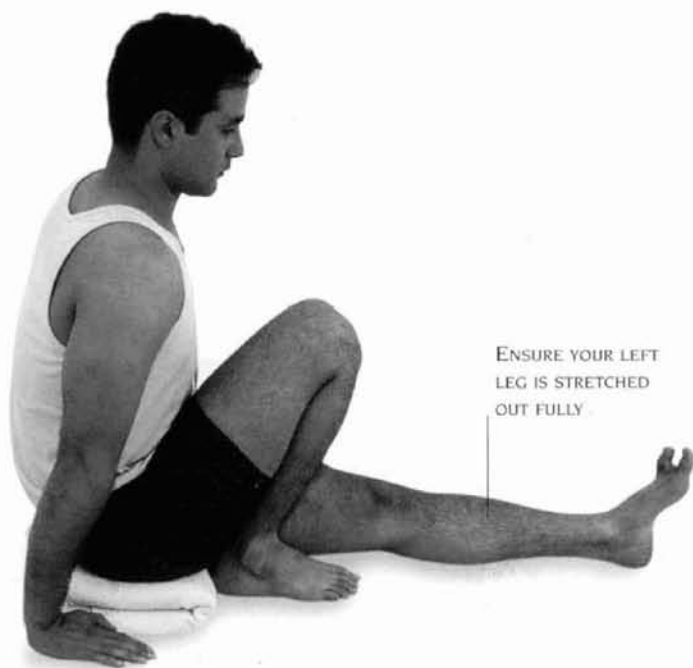
- Torso and leg stretch -



THIS ASANA IS DEDICATED to the sage, Marichi. His father was Brahma, creator of the universe, and his grandson was the sun god, Surya, the giver of life. Regular practice of the asana stretches your entire body and rejuvenates it. Marichyasana increases your levels of energy. The asana also massages and tones your abdominal organs.

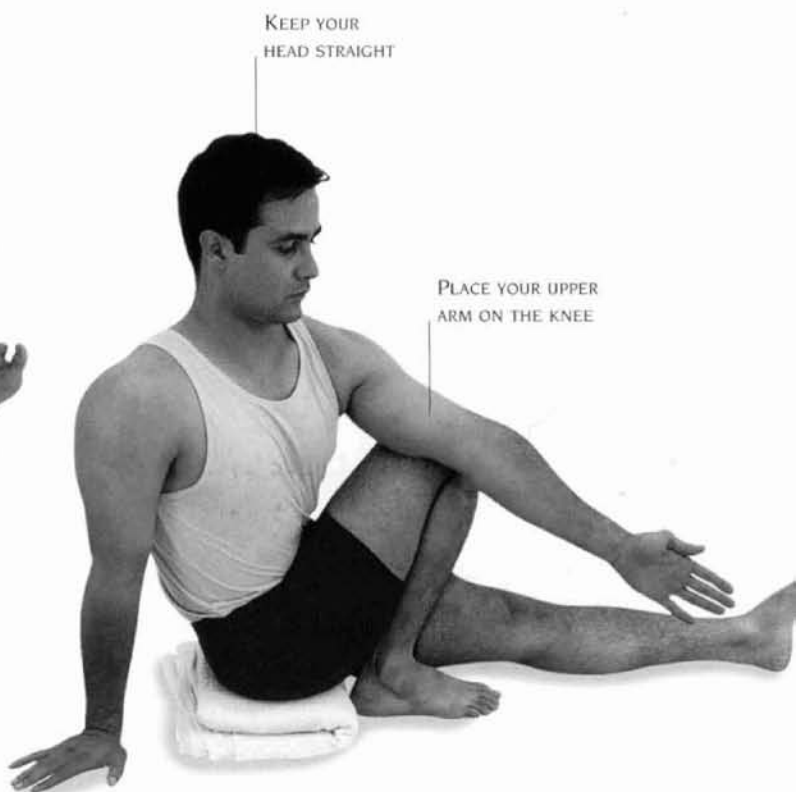
CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have diarrhoea or dysentery, or during a cold. Avoid this pose if you have a headache, migraine, insomnia, or when you are feeling fatigued. Do not practise during menstruation.



ENSURE YOUR LEFT
LEG IS STRETCHED
OUT FULLY

1 Sit on a folded blanket (see page 167) in Dandasana (see page 82). Bend your right knee, and pull your right foot toward its own thigh so that your right heel touches your right buttock. Keep the toes pointing forward and press the foot down on the floor. Place your palms on the floor, beside your buttocks, fingers pointing forward.



KEEP YOUR
HEAD STRAIGHT

PLACE YOUR UPPER
ARM ON THE KNEE

2 Exhale, and lift your spine. Turn your torso 90° to the right. Bend the left arm and, moving your left shoulder forward, stretch it out against your right thigh. Extend this arm from the armpit to the elbow – this is crucial to the final stretch. Do not allow your left leg to tilt to the left. Your weight should not fall on your right palm.

BENEFITS

◆
Increases energy levels

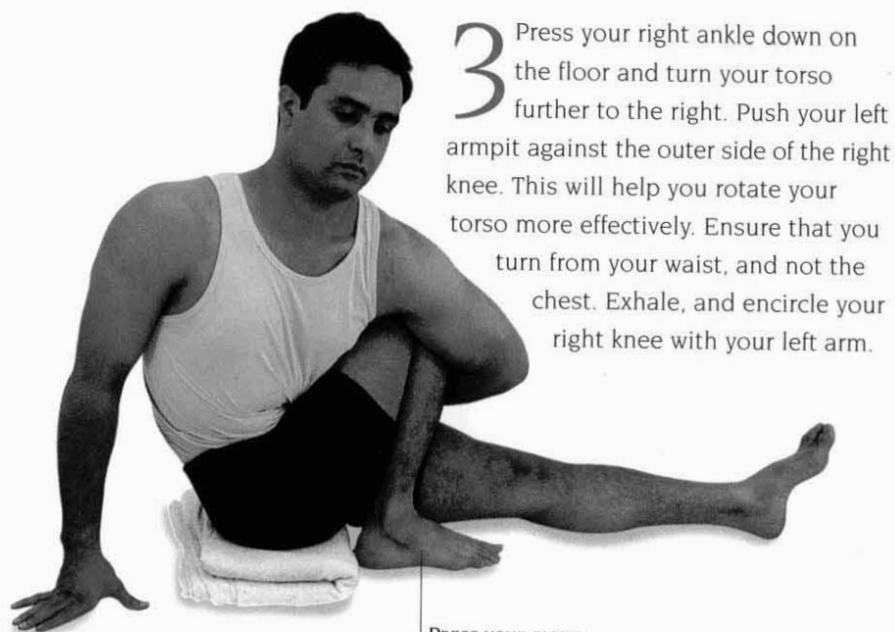
◆
Tones and massages the abdominal organs

◆
Improves the functioning of the liver, spleen, pancreas, kidneys, and intestines

◆
Reduces fat around the waistline

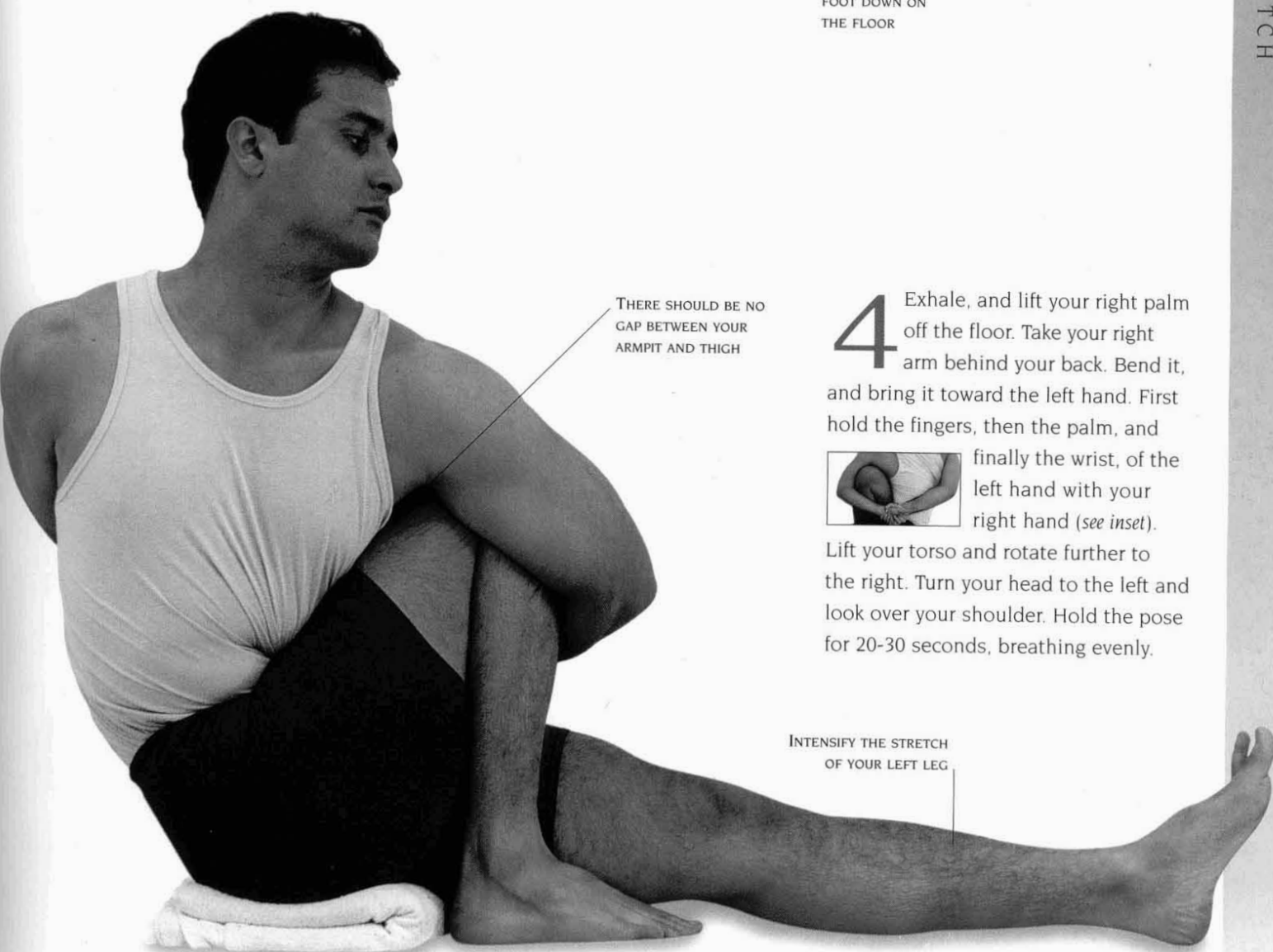
◆
Alleviates backache

◆
Relieves lumbago



PRESS YOUR RIGHT FOOT DOWN ON THE FLOOR

3 Press your right ankle down on the floor and turn your torso further to the right. Push your left armpit against the outer side of the right knee. This will help you rotate your torso more effectively. Ensure that you turn from your waist, and not the chest. Exhale, and encircle your right knee with your left arm.



THERE SHOULD BE NO GAP BETWEEN YOUR ARMPIT AND THIGH

4 Exhale, and lift your right palm off the floor. Take your right arm behind your back. Bend it, and bring it toward the left hand. First hold the fingers, then the palm, and finally the wrist, of the left hand with your right hand (see inset).

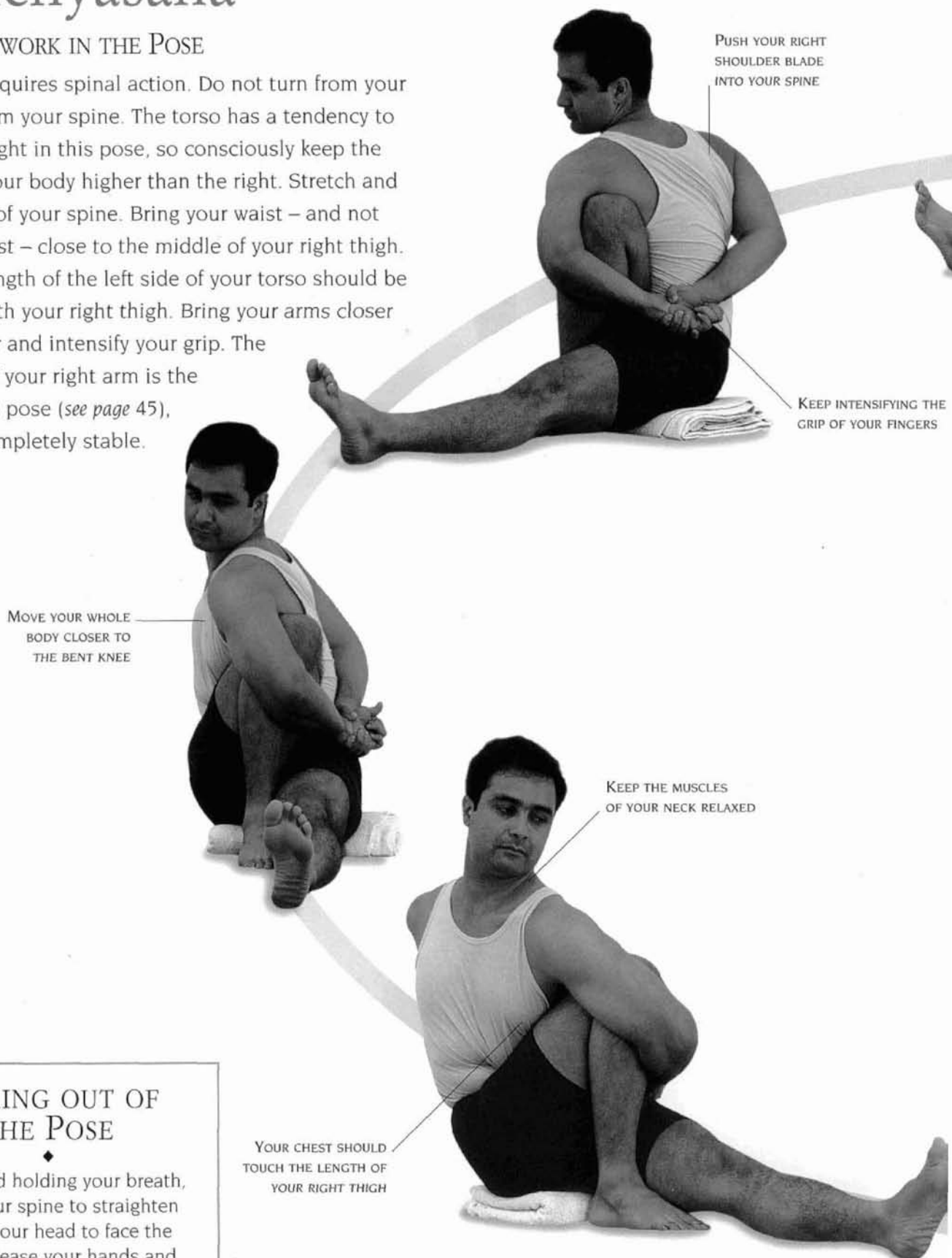
Lift your torso and rotate further to the right. Turn your head to the left and look over your shoulder. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds, breathing evenly.

INTENSIFY THE STRETCH OF YOUR LEFT LEG

Marichyasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

This asana requires spinal action. Do not turn from your arms, but from your spine. The torso has a tendency to lean to the right in this pose, so consciously keep the left side of your body higher than the right. Stretch and lift the front of your spine. Bring your waist – and not just your chest – close to the middle of your right thigh. The entire length of the left side of your torso should be in contact with your right thigh. Bring your arms closer to each other and intensify your grip. The upper part of your right arm is the “brain” of the pose (see page 45), so keep it completely stable.



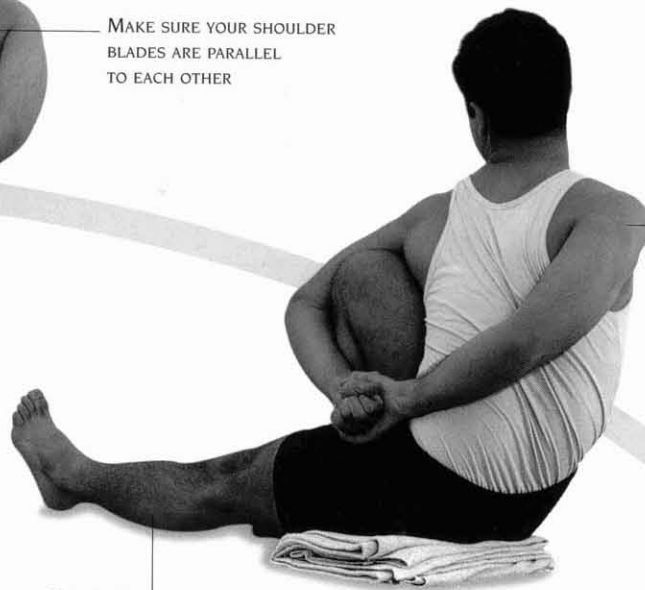
COMING OUT OF THE POSE

◆
Inhale, and holding your breath, rotate your spine to straighten it. Turn your head to face the front. Release your hands and straighten your leg. Repeat the pose on the other side. Return to Dandasana.



KEEP THE BACK
OF YOUR KNEE
ON THE FLOOR

MAKE SURE YOUR SHOULDER
BLADES ARE PARALLEL
TO EACH OTHER



MOVE YOUR ARMS
CLOSER TO EACH OTHER

DO NOT LET
YOUR LEG
TILT TO THE LEFT

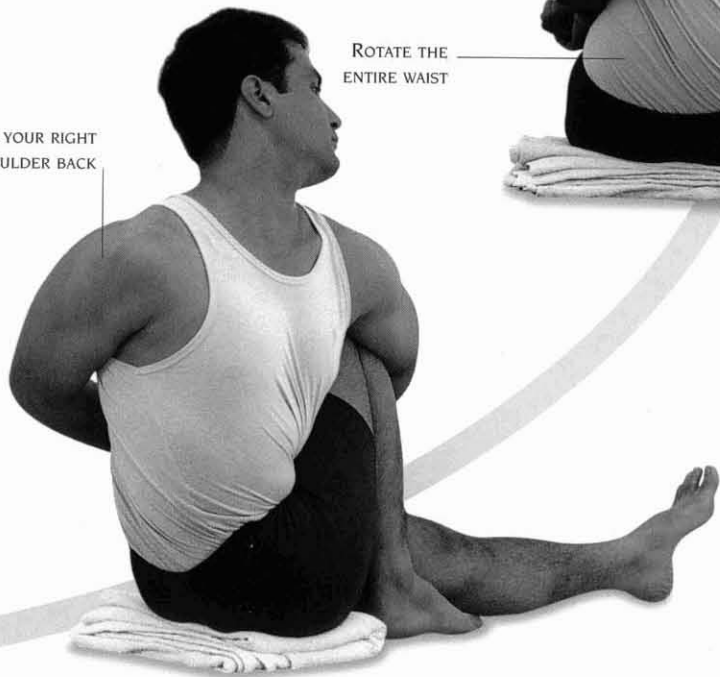


ROTATE THE
ENTIRE WAIST



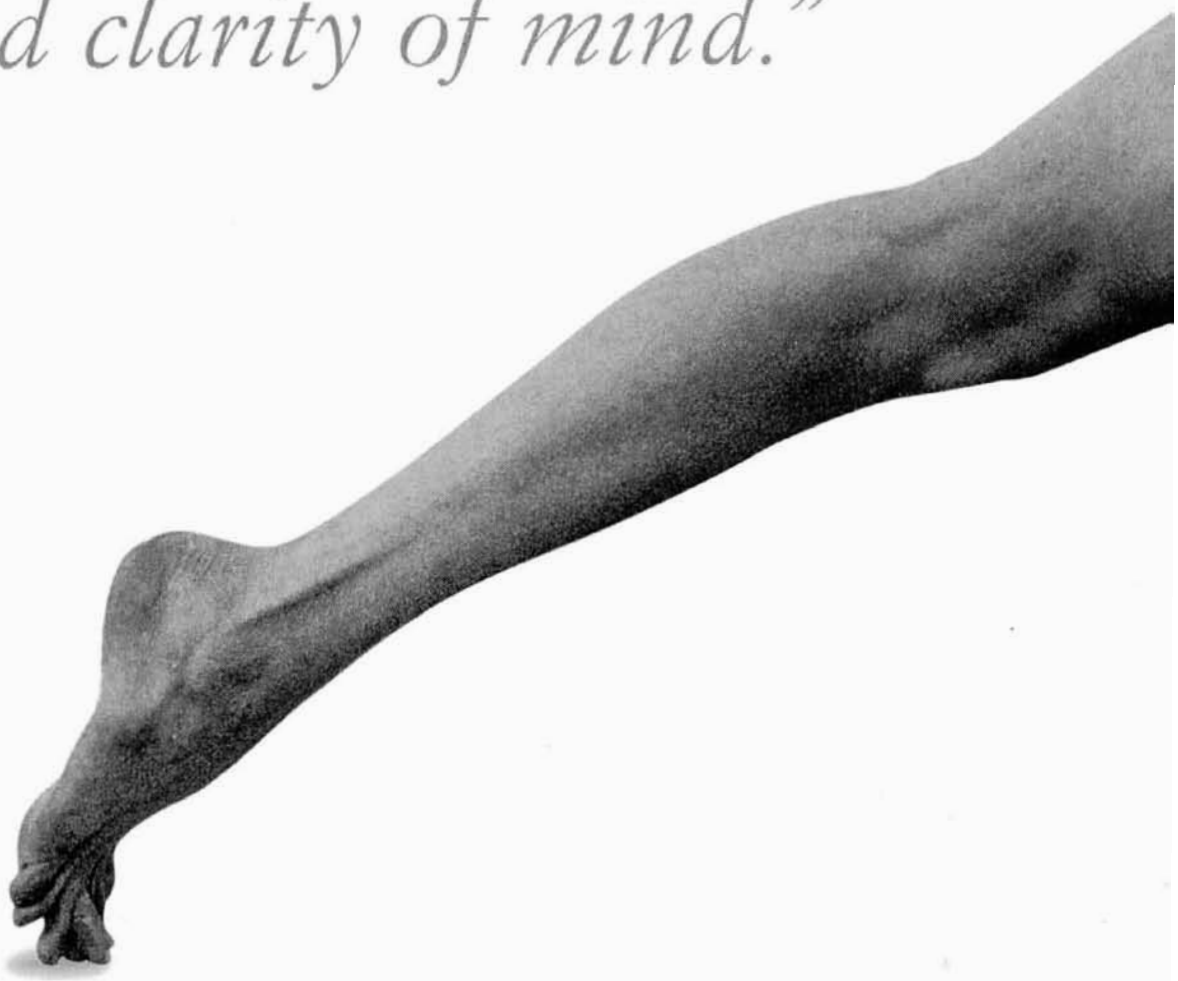
LOOK OVER YOUR
LEFT SHOULDER

MOVE YOUR RIGHT
SHOULDER BACK



Inversions

“The practice of asanas purges the body of its impurities, bringing strength, firmness, calm, and clarity of mind.”





सालंब शीर्षासन

Salamba Sirsasana

- Headstand -

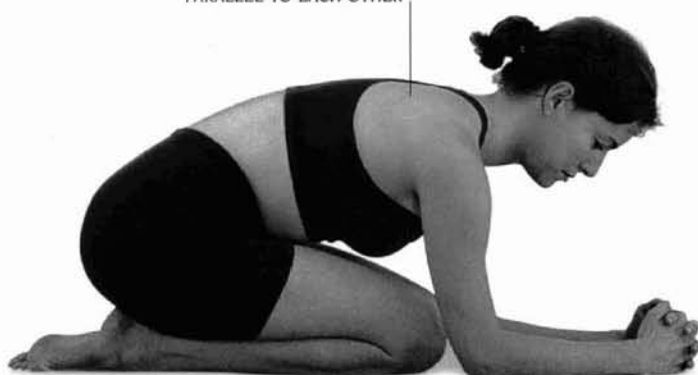


THE HEADSTAND IS ONE of the most important yogic asanas. The inversion in the final pose brings a rejuvenating supply of blood to the brain cells. Regular practice of this asana widens your spiritual horizons. It enhances clarity of thought, increases your concentration span, and sharpens memory. This asana helps those who get mentally exhausted easily. In Sanskrit, *sirsa* translates as "head", and *salamba* means "supported".

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have high blood pressure, cervical spondylosis, a cardiac condition, a backache, headache, or migraine. Do not start your yoga session with this pose if you have low blood pressure. Perform the asana only once in a session and do not repeat it if you fall – your body should not be overworked. Do not practise this asana during menstruation.

KEEP YOUR SHOULDERS
PARALLEL TO EACH OTHER

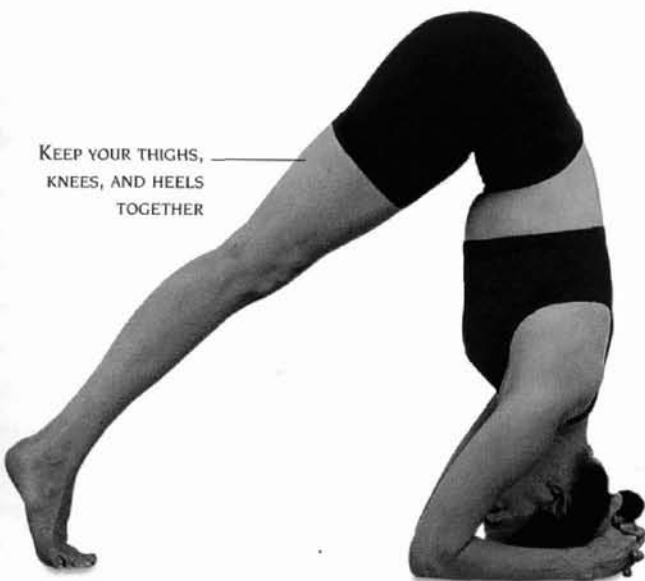


1 Kneel on the floor in Virasana (see page 84). Clasp the inside of your left elbow with your right hand and the inside of your right elbow with your left hand. Now lean forward and place your elbows on the floor. Ensure that the distance between your elbows is not wider than the breadth of the shoulders. Release your hands and interlock your fingers to form a cup with your hands (see inset). Keep your fingers firmly locked, but not rigid. Place your joined hands on the floor.



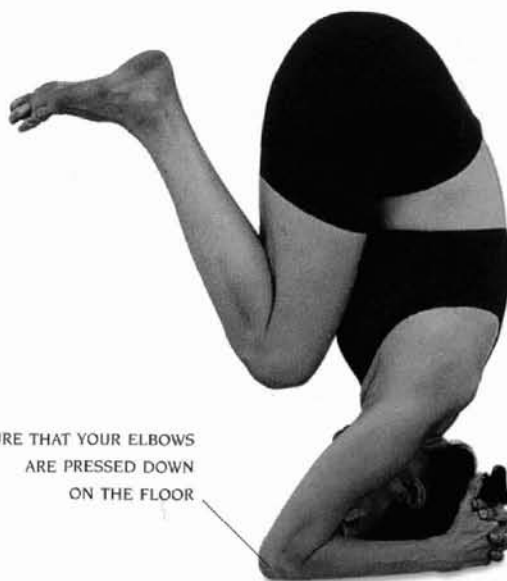
2 Place the crown of your head on the floor, so that the back of the head touches your cupped palms. Check that only the crown is resting on the floor, not the forehead, or the back of the head. In the final pose, your weight must rest exactly on the centre, not the back or front, otherwise, the pressure will fall on your neck or eyes, causing your spine to bend. Make sure that your little fingers touch the back of the head, but are not underneath it. Hold this position for a few seconds, breathing evenly.

KEEP YOUR THIGHS,
KNEES, AND HEELS
TOGETHER



3 Push up on the balls of your feet and straighten your knees. Keep your heels raised off the floor. To ensure that your torso is perpendicular to the floor, walk your feet toward your head, until the back of your body forms a vertical line from your head to the back of the waist.

ENSURE THAT YOUR ELBOWS
ARE PRESSED DOWN
ON THE FLOOR



4 Exhale, and bring your knees toward the chest. Then, press your toes down on the floor, and push your legs upward, off the floor. This action resembles a hop and gives you the thrust to raise your legs. Bring your heels close to your buttocks.

BEGINNERS Practise this asana against a wall (see box below).

SALAMBA SIRASANA AGAINST A WALL

BEGINNERS Practise against a corner where two walls meet at a right angle, until you gain the confidence to practise without support. Place a folded blanket against the corner. Then follow Steps 1-3 (see left and above). Ensure that your cupped hands are placed not more than 5-8cm (2-3in) from the corner. If not, your weight will fall on your elbows, causing your spine to bend and your eyes to protrude. Follow Steps 4, 5, and 6 shown here. Initially, ask someone to help you raise your legs off the floor. To come out of the pose, follow the instructions on page 122 or reverse Steps 4-6.



4 Once your torso is positioned perpendicular to the floor, rest your hips against the corner. Now bend your left knee and raise your left foot off the floor. Then swing it upward and rest the foot on the corner, above your left buttock. Repeat with the right leg.

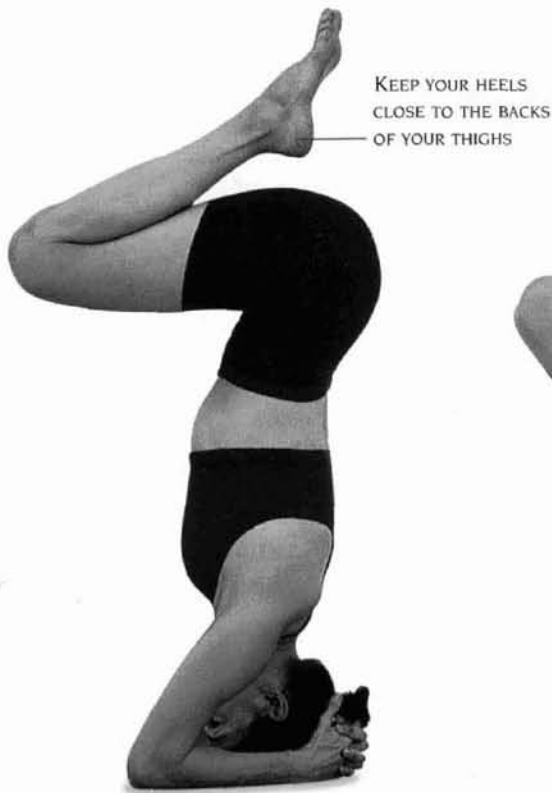


5 In this position, your hips and the balls of your feet rest against the corner. Adjust your body in the pose — press your elbows to the floor and stretch your upper arms. Follow the stretch through the armpits and along the torso to the waist.



6 Straighten your legs, one by one, until your hips, legs, and heels rest against the corner. With practice, bring your hips away from the wall and let your head, arms, and torso bear your weight. Constant support of the wall will bend your spine.

Salamba Sirsasana



5 Press your elbows to the floor and lift your shoulders up, away from the floor (*see inset*). Exhale, and gently swing your knees upward in a



smooth arc, until both your thighs are parallel to the floor. In this position, the entire upper body, from the head to the waist and hips, should be perpendicular to the floor. Do not move your elbows until you come out of the final pose.



6 Continue to move the knees upward, slowly bringing them to point to the ceiling. Keep the heels close to the buttocks. Focus on your balance and do not allow your torso to move during this action. Steps 5, 6, and 7 constitute a gentle, continuous movement, as you raise your legs toward the ceiling.



7 Once your knees are pointing to the ceiling, hold the pose for a few breaths. Make sure that the spine is straight. Tighten the buttocks. Ensure that your thighs are positioned perpendicular to the floor, your lower legs bent toward your back. Check that your shoulders do not tilt. Pause and get used to the feel of the position.

8 Straighten your knees to bring the lower legs in line with the thighs, so that your body forms a vertical line. Point your toes toward the ceiling. Tighten both knees, as in Tadasana (see page 48), and keep your thighs, knees, and toes together. The entire body should be balanced on the crown, not on the forearms and hands, which should simply support the balance in the pose. Stretch your upper arms, torso, and waist upward, along the legs to the toes, ensuring that your torso does not tilt. Steadiness and a constant lift of the shoulders ensure stability in the posture. Hold the pose for 5 minutes, breathing evenly.

TIGHTEN THE
QUADRICEP MUSCLES

STRETCH THE BACKS OF
YOUR KNEES AND THIGHS

EXPAND YOUR CHEST



BENEFITS

- ◆ Builds stamina
- ◆ Alleviates insomnia
- ◆ Reduces the occurrence of heart palpitations
- ◆ Helps to cure halitosis
- ◆ Strengthens the lungs
- ◆ Improves the function of the pituitary and pineal glands
- ◆ Increases the haemoglobin content in the blood
- ◆ Relieves the symptoms of colds, coughs, and tonsillitis
- ◆ Brings relief from digestive and eliminatory problems, when practised in conjunction with Salamba Sarvangasana

CORRECTING YOURSELF



You may find that your legs lose alignment with the torso, either by wavering to the right or left. Check the position of your elbows and tighten your knees.



If you do not stretch the dorsal area and chest, your legs will swing forward and your buttocks jut back. When this happens, your weight falls on your elbows, not your head.

Salamba Sirsasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

As you hold the pose, stretch your whole body, from the upper arms to the toes. Lift and widen the sternum so that your chest expands equally on all sides. Tighten your knees and bring your legs to the median plane. This will ensure that they are perpendicular to the floor. Pull the abdominal muscles in and toward the waist to extend the lower spine. You must practise this asana from the spine, not the brain. Balance is the key to this asana, not strength. You must develop the skill to balance effortlessly on the small surface area of the crown. This brings a feeling of lightness to the brain and complete relaxation to each part of the body.



LENGTHEN THE SPINE
FROM THE NECK TO
THE TAILBONE



EXTEND THE BACKS
OF THE KNEES AND
STRETCH YOUR SHINS



STRETCH THE BICEPS
AND DELTOIDS UP

ELONGATE THE INNER
SIDES OF YOUR LEGS

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

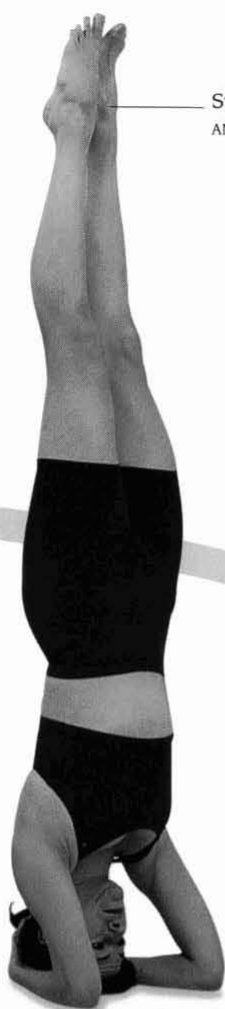
Keep your legs straight and close together. Lower them until your toes rest on the floor. Bend the knees, kneel, and sit on your calves. Rest your forehead on the floor. Stay in this position for a few seconds before sitting up in Virasana.

RELAX THE FINGERS BUT
KEEP THEM FIRMLY LOCKED

ASANAS FOR YOU



STRETCH THE OUTER
SIDES OF YOUR
LEGS UPWARD



STRETCH YOUR FEET
AND ANKLES

POINT THE TOES
TO THE CEILING



LENGTHEN THE FRONT
OF YOUR FEET

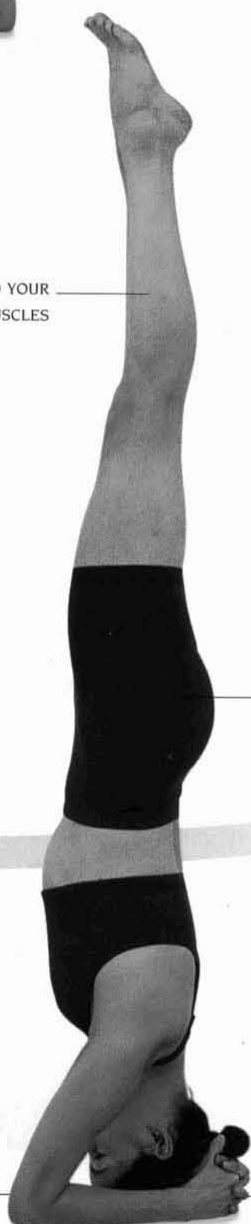


TIGHTEN THE
ABDOMINAL MUSCLES

PRESS YOUR ELBOWS
TO THE FLOOR



EXTEND YOUR
CALF MUSCLES



TIGHTEN THE
BUTTOCKS

LIFT THE SHOULDERS AWAY
FROM THE FLOOR AND OPEN
YOUR ARMPITS



सालंब सर्वांगासन

Salamba Sarvangasana

- Shoulderstand -



PRACTISING THIS ASANA integrates your mind with your body and soul. Your brain feels bright yet calm, your body feels light and infused with radiance. The inverted pose allows fresh, healthy blood to circulate around your neck and chest. This alleviates bronchial disorders and stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands. *Salamba* means "propped up" in Sanskrit, while *sarvanga* indicates "all the limbs" of the body.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this pose if you have diarrhoea, or during menstruation. People with high blood pressure should only attempt this asana immediately after holding the final pose of Halasana (see page 130) for at least 3 minutes.

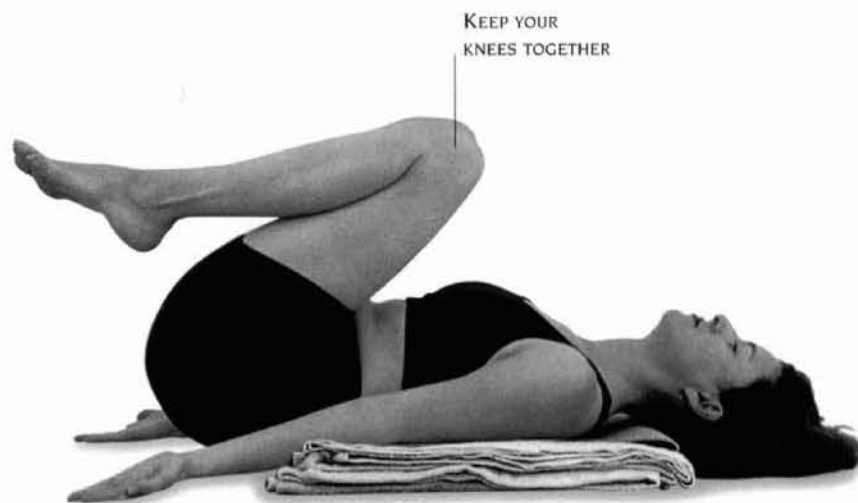


1 Place a mat on 3 folded blankets, one on top of the other, (see page 167) on the floor. Lie down with your neck, shoulders, and back on the blankets. Rest your head on the floor. Stretch your legs and tighten your knees. Push the inner sides of your legs toward your heels. Press the outer sides of

your shoulders down on the blankets. Raise your upper spine, but push your lower spine down on the blankets. Stretch your arms out close to your body, palms facing the ceiling. Make sure that your wrists touch your body. Raise and expand your sternum without moving your head.

2 Roll your shoulders back and pull in your shoulder blades. Turn your upper arms out slightly and stretch the inner sides of your arms toward the little fingers of each hand. Exhale, and bend your knees.

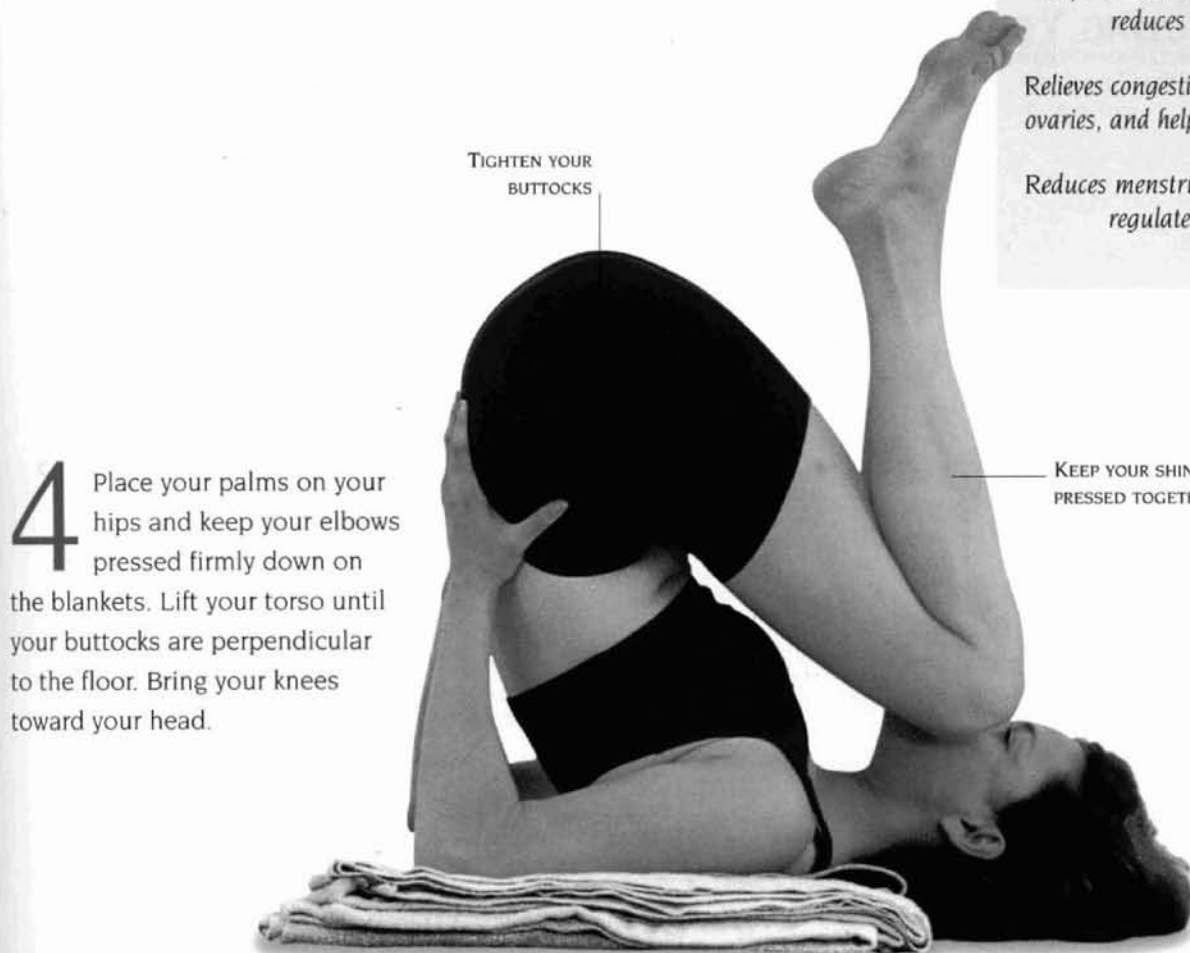




3 Without moving the upper part of your body, exhale and raise your hips and buttocks off the floor. Bring your knees over your chest.

BEGINNERS If you find it difficult, at first, to raise your hips off the floor, ask a helper to hold your ankles and

push your bent legs toward your head. At the same time, lift your hips and back off the floor and come to the final pose. Keep your body firm, and rest your back against your helper's knees. Alternatively, once you have been helped to raise your legs off the floor, follow Steps 5, 6, and 7 on the next page.

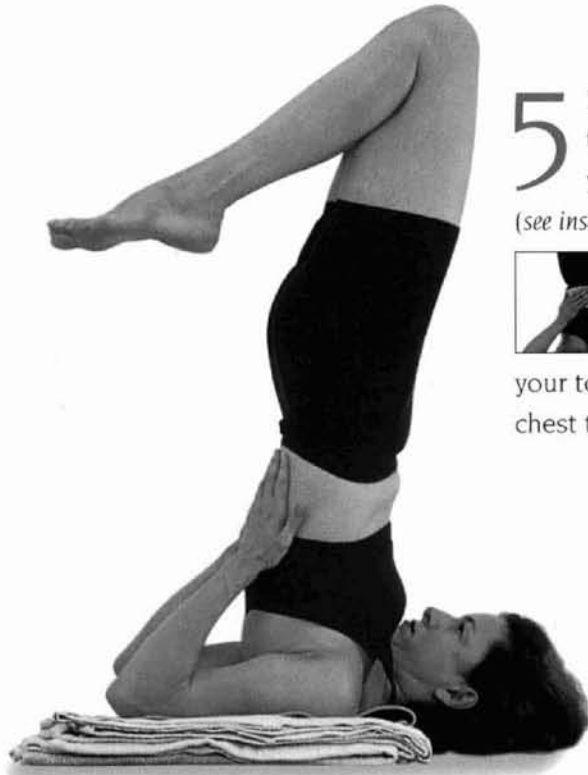


4 Place your palms on your hips and keep your elbows pressed firmly down on the blankets. Lift your torso until your buttocks are perpendicular to the floor. Bring your knees toward your head.

BENEFITS

- ◆ *Alleviates hypertension*
- ◆ *Relieves insomnia and soothes the nerves*
- ◆ *Improves the functioning of the thyroid and parathyroid glands*
- ◆ *Alleviates asthma, bronchitis, and throat ailments*
- ◆ *Relieves breathlessness and palpitations*
- ◆ *Helps to treat colds and sinus blockages*
- ◆ *Improves bowel movements and relieves colitis*
- ◆ *Helps to treat haemorrhoids*
- ◆ *Alleviates urinary disorders*
- ◆ *Helps to treat hernia*
- ◆ *Helps to treat a prolapsed uterus and reduces uterine fibroids*
- ◆ *Relieves congestion and heaviness in the ovaries, and helps to treat ovarian cysts*
- ◆ *Reduces menstrual cramps and helps to regulate menstrual flow*

Salamba Sarvangasana



5 Now, slide your hands down to the middle of your back, so that your palms cover your kidneys (see inset). Point your thumbs toward the



front of your body and your fingers toward the spine. Exhale, and raise your torso, hips, and knees, until your chest touches your chin. Breathe evenly.

STRETCH AND OPEN THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET

CORRECTING YOURSELF

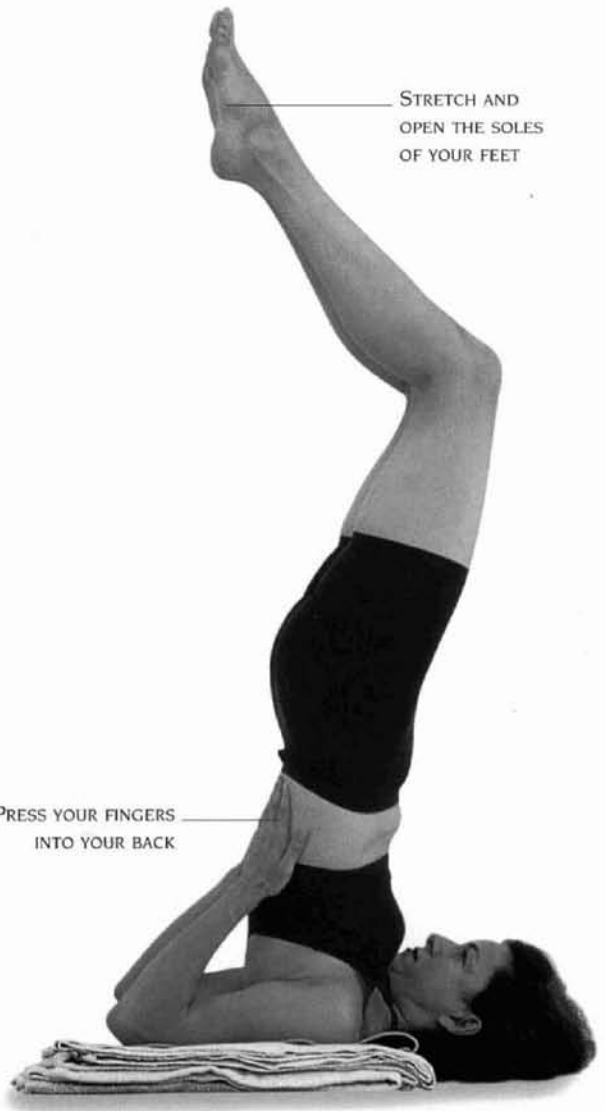


If your legs tilt to the right or left in the final pose, bend your knees and move your waist so that it aligns with your chest. Then, straighten your legs again.



If your torso tilts forward, you will feel a heaviness in your chest and find it difficult to breathe. Push up your waist, thighs, and hips, and do not allow your buttocks to drop.

PRESS YOUR FINGERS INTO YOUR BACK



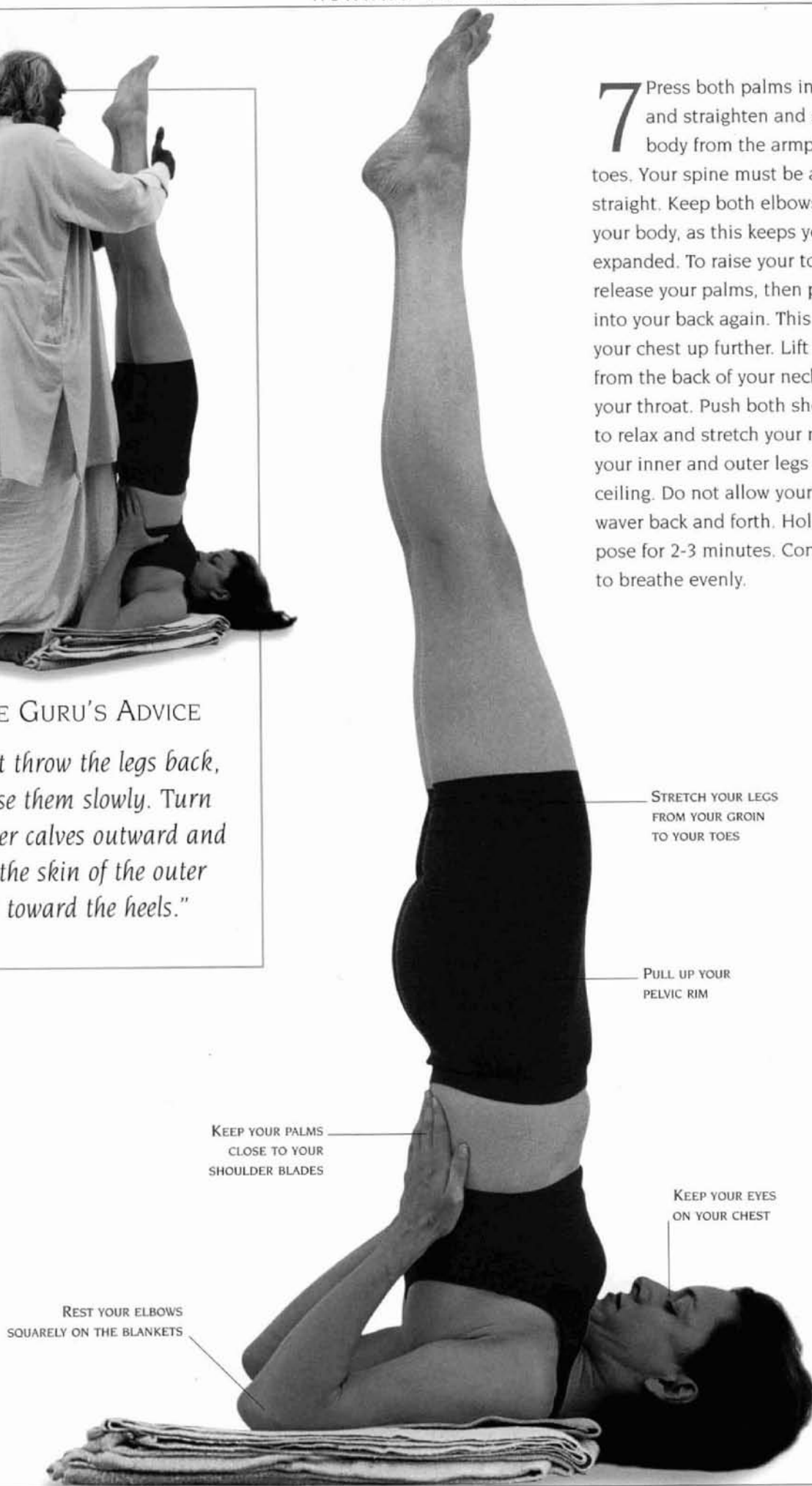
6 Raise your feet toward the ceiling. Only the back of your neck, shoulders, and upper arms should rest on the blankets. Make sure that your body is perpendicular to the floor, from the shoulders to the knees.



THE GURU'S ADVICE

"Do not throw the legs back, but raise them slowly. Turn the inner calves outward and extend the skin of the outer legs up toward the heels."

7 Press both palms into your back and straighten and stretch your body from the armpits to the toes. Your spine must be absolutely straight. Keep both elbows close to your body, as this keeps your chest expanded. To raise your torso further, release your palms, then press them into your back again. This will push your chest up further. Lift your body from the back of your neck, and not your throat. Push both shoulders back, to relax and stretch your neck. Extend your inner and outer legs toward the ceiling. Do not allow your legs to waver back and forth. Hold the pose for 2-3 minutes. Continue to breathe evenly.



STRETCH YOUR LEGS
FROM YOUR GROIN
TO YOUR TOES

PULL UP YOUR
PELVIC RIM

KEEP YOUR PALMS
CLOSE TO YOUR
SHOULDER BLADES

KEEP YOUR EYES
ON YOUR CHEST

REST YOUR ELBOWS
SQUARELY ON THE BLANKETS

Salamba Sarvangasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

Create life in your spine. The energy in your spine should flow into your body through your fingers. Keep your eyes on your sternum, as this reinforces your will power and steadies your mind. Press your thumbs into the muscles of your back to push them toward the spine. This compresses the back. In the asana, your back should be narrow and your chest broad. Do not allow your elbows to spread outward. Bring them together, as too wide a distance between them makes your chest concave. Keep the bridge of your nose aligned with the middle of your sternum. Move your shoulders back. Focus on your inner legs, and stretch them toward the ceiling. This is a subtle and difficult action, but can be achieved over time. With practice, increase the duration of the pose to 5 minutes. Breathe evenly.

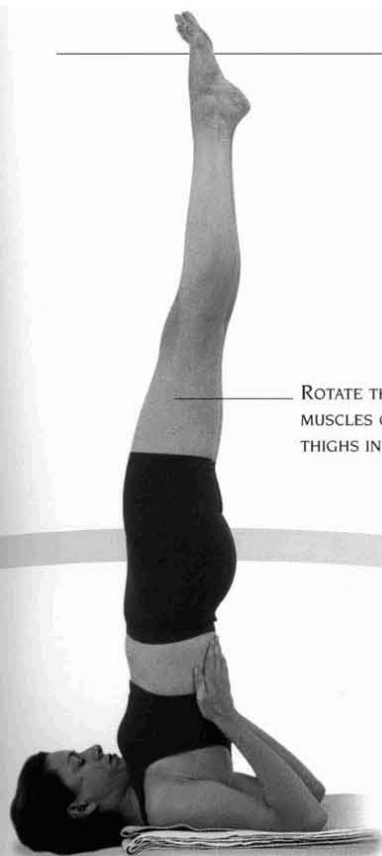
KEEP YOUR SHOULDERS
BACK — AWAY FROM
YOUR HEAD

CONTRACT YOUR
KNEECAPS EVENLY
FROM ALL SIDES

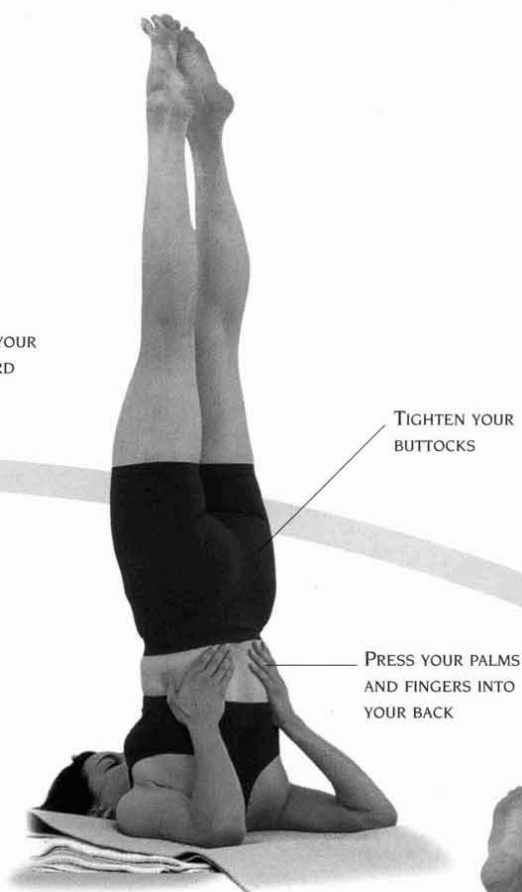
KEEP YOUR
STERNUM STRAIGHT

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Exhale, and bend your legs at the knees. Bring your thighs toward the stomach, then gently lower your buttocks and back toward the floor. Release the hands and bring them to your sides. Lie on the floor and relax your whole body.



ROTATE THE
MUSCLES OF YOUR
THIGHS INWARD



TIGHTEN YOUR
BUTTOCKS

PRESS YOUR PALMS
AND FINGERS INTO
YOUR BACK

STRETCH THE SOLES
OF YOUR FEET



KEEP YOUR ELBOWS
CLOSE TOGETHER

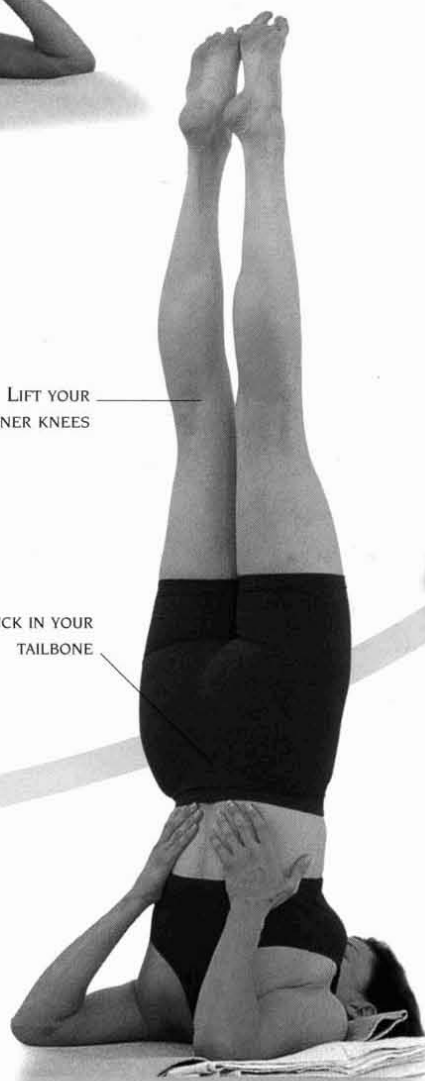


PUSH YOUR HIPS
INTO YOUR BODY

BRING YOUR CHEST
TO YOUR CHIN

LIFT YOUR
INNER KNEES

TUCK IN YOUR
TAILBONE



हलासन Halasana

- Plough pose -



IN THIS ASANA, your body takes the shape of a plough – *hala* is the Sanskrit word for “plough”. Practising Halasana regularly helps to increase your self-confidence and energy. The asana helps to restore calm and clarity of mind after a long illness.

Halasana alleviates the effects of stress and strain by resting and relaxing your eyes and brain.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have ischaemia, cervical spondylosis, or diarrhoea. Avoid this pose during menstruation. If you are prone to headaches, migraine, asthma, breathing difficulties, high blood pressure, physical and mental fatigue, or are overweight, practise Halasana with props (see page 214) and with your eyes closed.



REST YOUR HEAD
ON THE FLOOR

1 Place two folded blankets, covered by a mat (see page 167), on the floor. Lie down with your back, neck, and shoulders resting on the blankets. Keep your legs stretched out and tightened at the knees. Focus on your inner legs and stretch from your thighs to your heels. Place your arms by your sides, with your palms flat on the floor.

EXTEND THE ARCHES
OF YOUR FEET UPWARD

3 Raise your hips and buttocks toward the ceiling in a smooth, rolling action. Bring your knees close to your chin and raise your lower legs, until your shins are perpendicular to the floor.

BEGINNERS Once you have raised your buttocks off the floor, ask a helper to hold your ankles and push your legs toward your head.



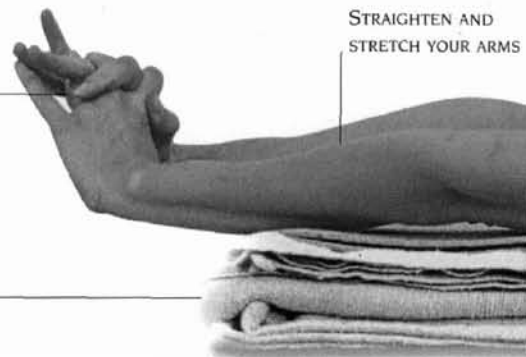
KEEP YOUR KNEES
TOGETHER



INTERLOCK YOUR
FINGERS FIRMLY

2 Exhale, lift your buttocks off the floor, and bring your knees to your chest. Keep your arms straight and press your fingers firmly down on the floor. Push your shoulders back and broaden your chest.

STRAIGHTEN AND
STRETCH YOUR ARMS



BENEFITS

Relieves fatigue and boosts energy levels

Controls hypertension

Rejuvenates the abdominal organs and improves digestion

Lengthens the spine, and improves its alignment

Helps to treat hernia and haemorrhoids, if practised with legs separated

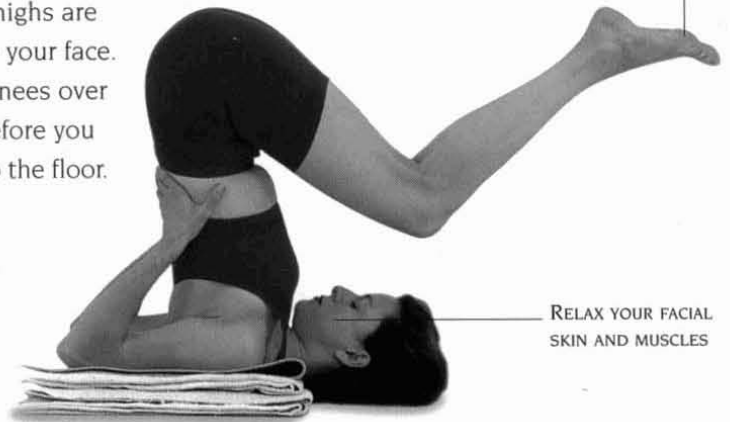
Relieves pain or cramps in the fingers, hands, wrists, elbows, and shoulders, if practised with arms and interlocked fingers extended toward the legs

4 Bend your elbows. Place your hands on the small of your back (see inset). Raise your hips and buttocks even further, until your torso



is perpendicular to the floor and your thighs are positioned above your face. Bring your bent knees over your forehead, before you lower your legs to the floor. Breathe evenly.

KEEP YOUR FEET, KNEES, AND THIGHS TOGETHER



RELAX YOUR FACIAL SKIN AND MUSCLES

5 Swing your hips and buttocks over your head, until they are perpendicular to the floor and in line with your shoulders. Slowly straighten your legs, and lower them until your toes rest on the floor. Raise your chest, bringing your sternum to touch your chin. Stretch your arms out behind your back on the blankets. Then interlock your fingers firmly at the knuckles, rotating your wrists until your hands point toward the ceiling. Stay in the pose for 1-5 minutes. Breathe evenly.

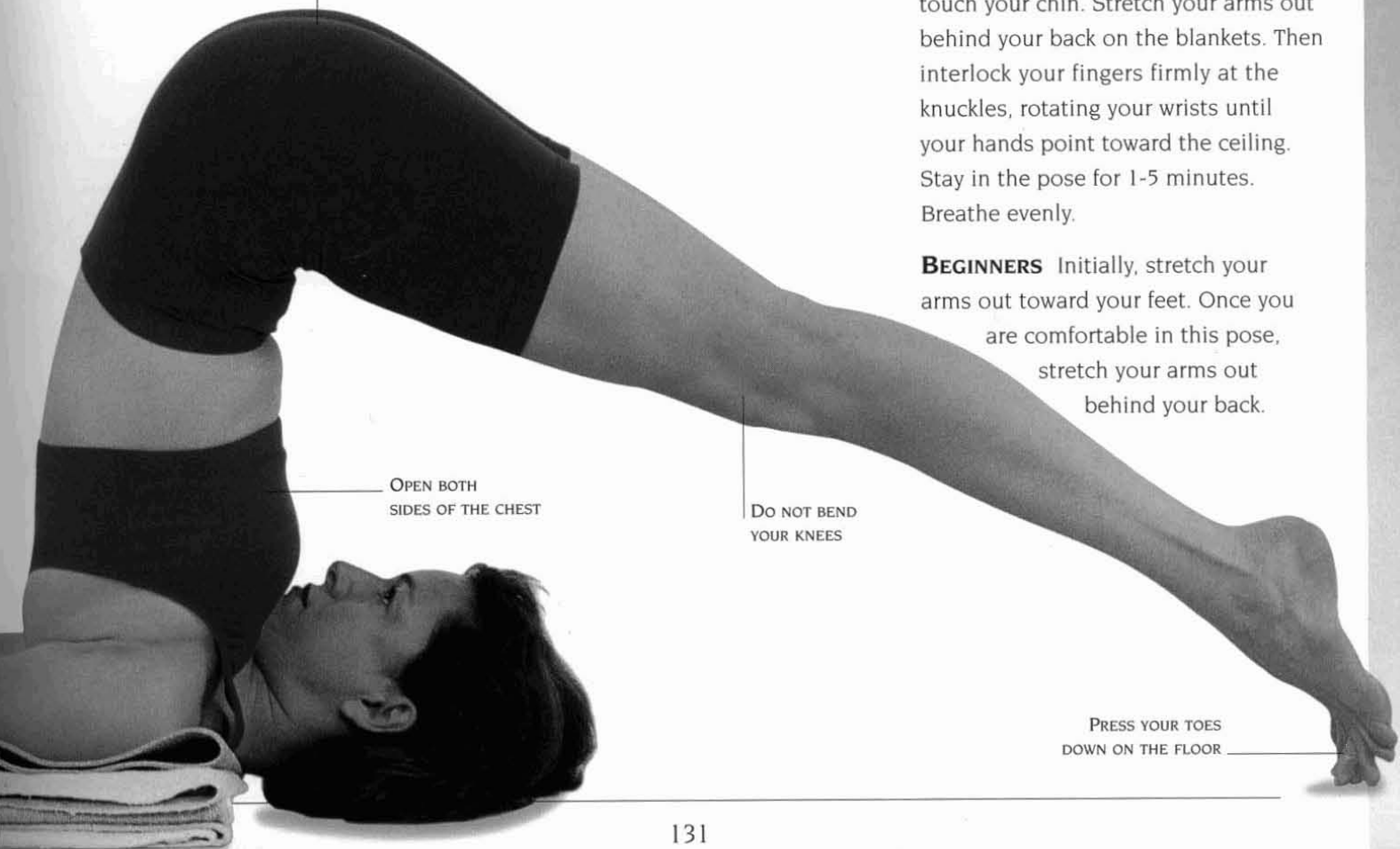
BEGINNERS Initially, stretch your arms out toward your feet. Once you are comfortable in this pose, stretch your arms out behind your back.

TIGHTEN YOUR BUTTOCKS

OPEN BOTH SIDES OF THE CHEST

DO NOT BEND YOUR KNEES

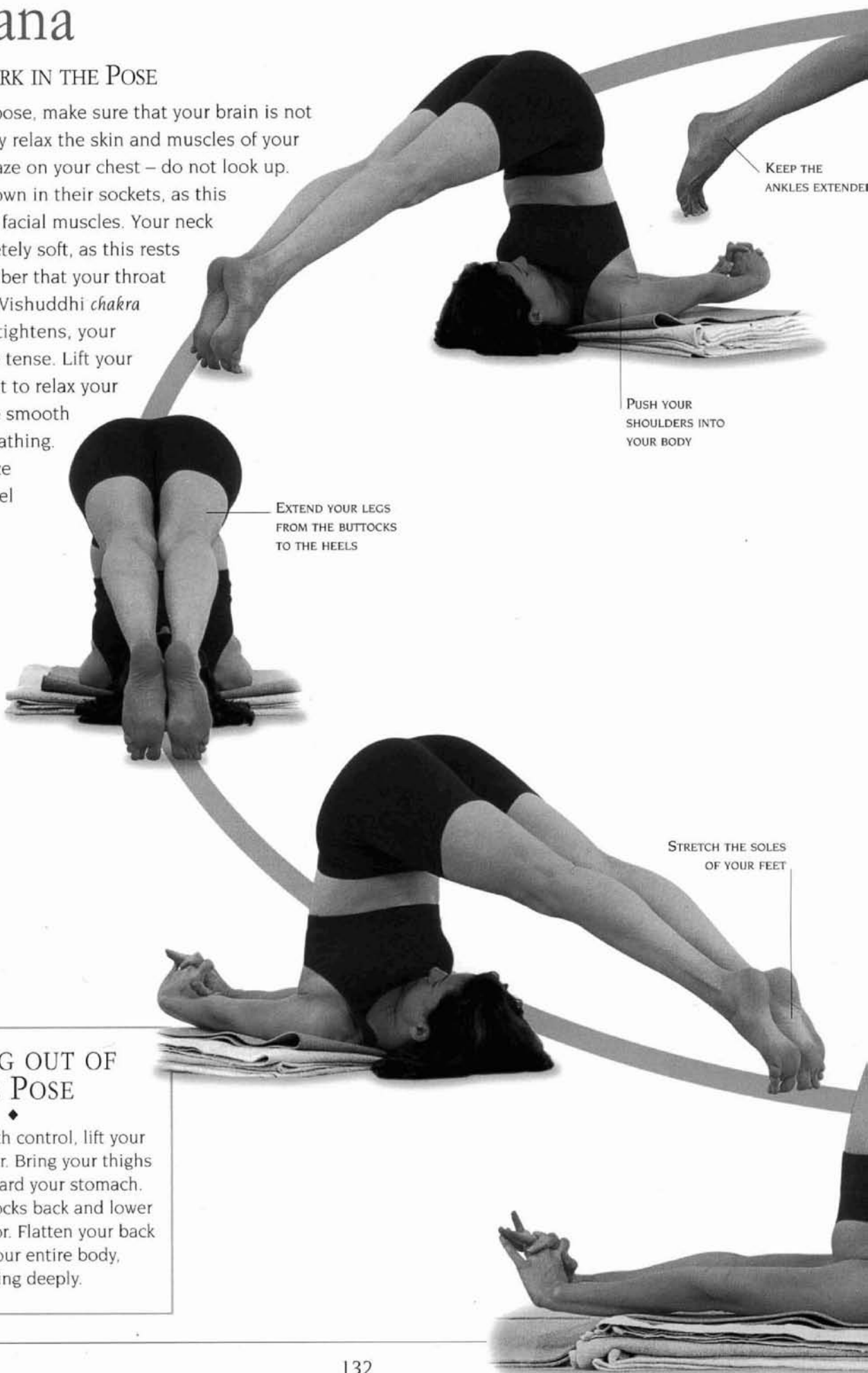
PRESS YOUR TOES DOWN ON THE FLOOR



Halasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

As you hold this pose, make sure that your brain is not tense. Consciously relax the skin and muscles of your face. Keep your gaze on your chest – do not look up. Drop your eyes down in their sockets, as this helps to relax the facial muscles. Your neck should be completely soft, as this rests the brain. Remember that your throat is the site of the Vishuddhi *chakra* (see page 37). If it tightens, your brain will become tense. Lift your sternum and chest to relax your throat and ensure smooth and effortless breathing. Increase the space between your navel and diaphragm.



KEEP THE ANKLES EXTENDED

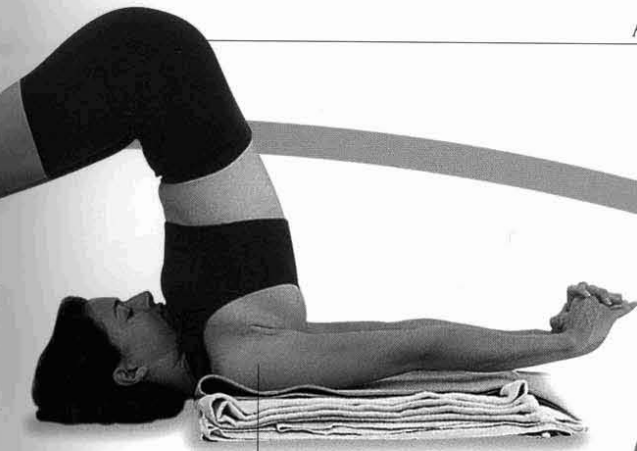
PUSH YOUR SHOULDERS INTO YOUR BODY

EXTEND YOUR LEGS FROM THE BUTTOCKS TO THE HEELS

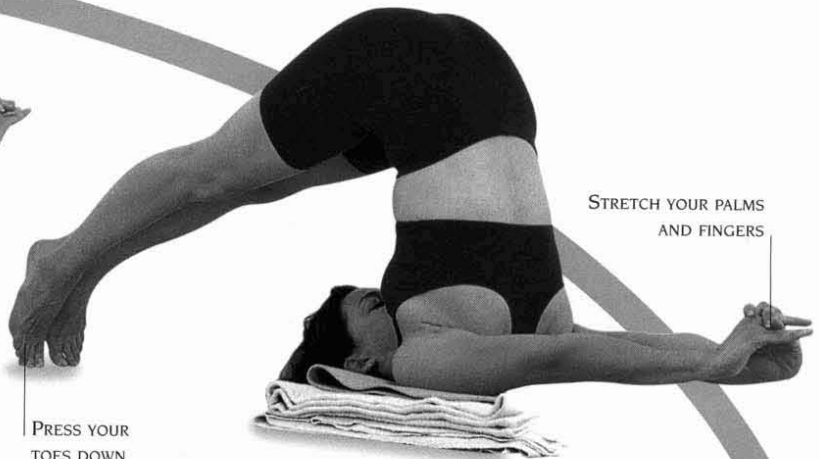
STRETCH THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Slowly, and with control, lift your legs off the floor. Bring your thighs and knees toward your stomach. Push your buttocks back and lower them to the floor. Flatten your back and relax your entire body, breathing deeply.

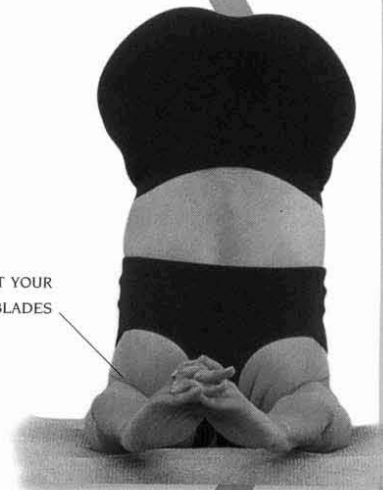


EXTEND YOUR ARMS
AWAY FROM THE
ARMPITS

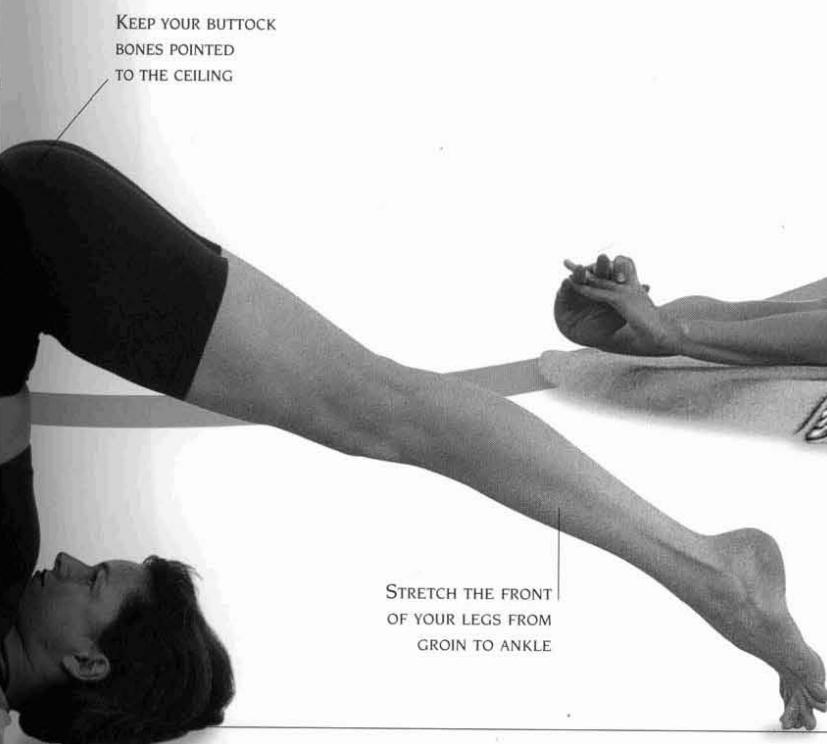


PRESS YOUR
TOES DOWN
ON THE FLOOR

STRETCH YOUR PALMS
AND FINGERS



LIFT YOUR
SHOULDER BLADES



KEEP YOUR BUTTOCK
BONES POINTED
TO THE CEILING

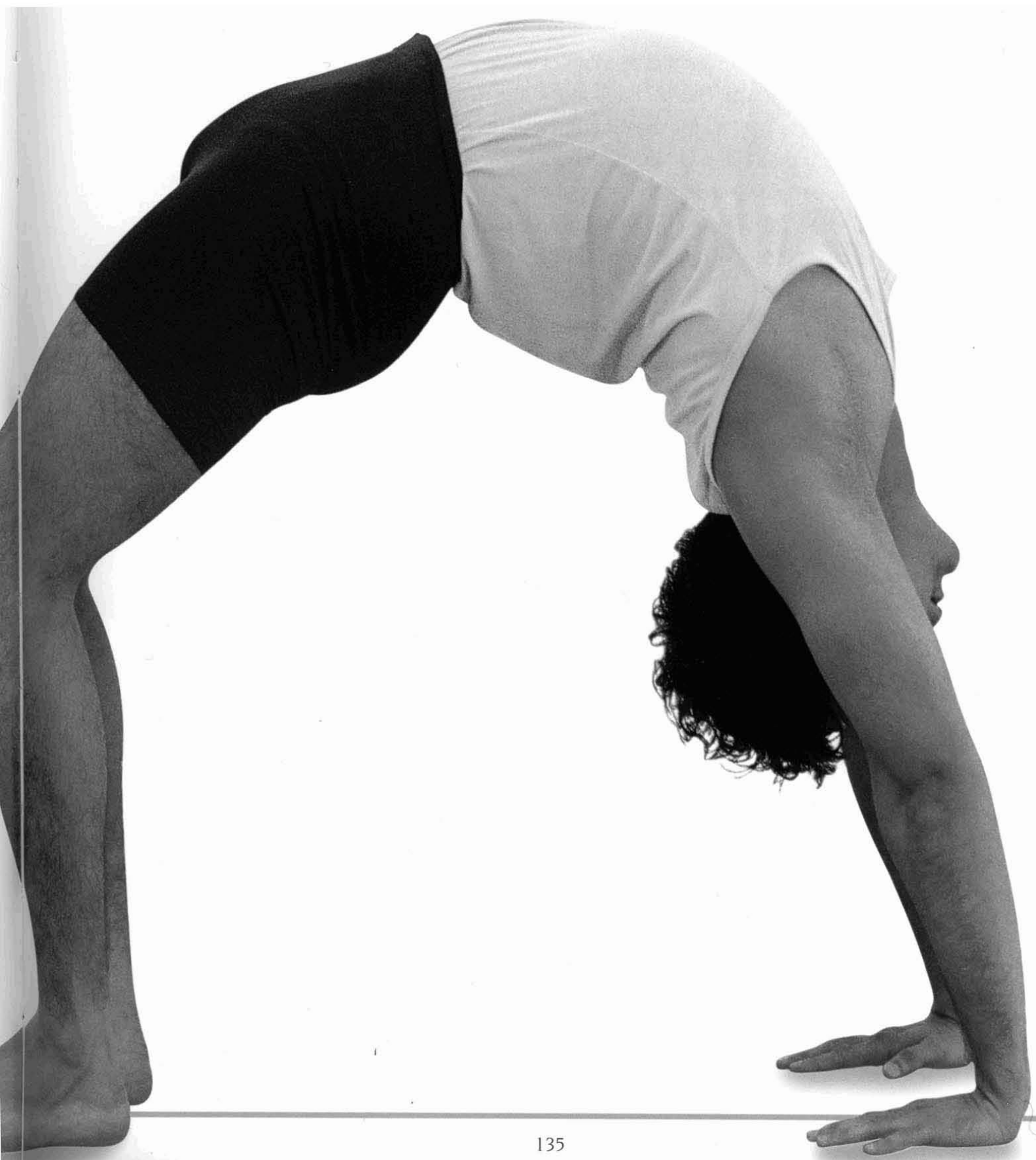
STRETCH THE FRONT
OF YOUR LEGS FROM
GROIN TO ANKLE



TURN YOUR UPPER
ARMS OUT SLIGHTLY

Back Bends

“Asanas penetrate deep into each layer of the body and ultimately into the consciousness itself.”



उष्ट्रासन

Ustrasana

- Camel pose -

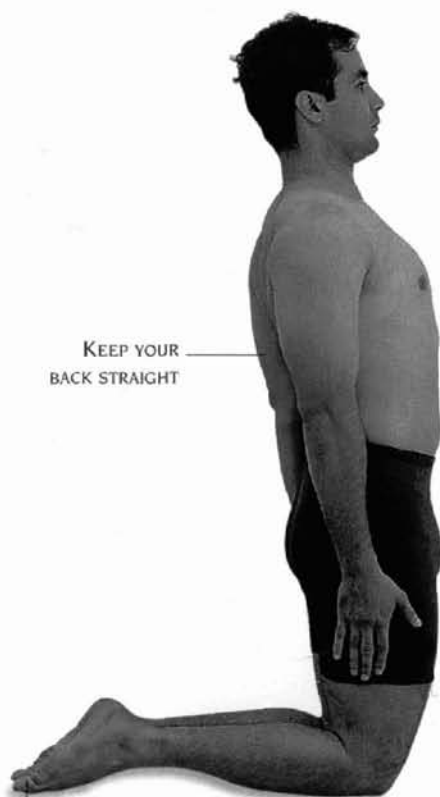


IN THIS ASANA, you bend back until the shape of your body resembles that of a camel – *ustra* means “camel” in Sanskrit. Ustrasana is recommended for beginners, as well as for the elderly, because the balance of the final pose is relatively easy to attain.

The asana also helps people in sedentary occupations, whose work entails bending forward for long periods. Practising the asana regularly will relieve stiffness in the back, shoulders, and ankles.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have severe constipation, diarrhoea, headaches, migraine, or hypertension. If you are recovering from a heart attack, practise Ustrasana with props (see page 222).

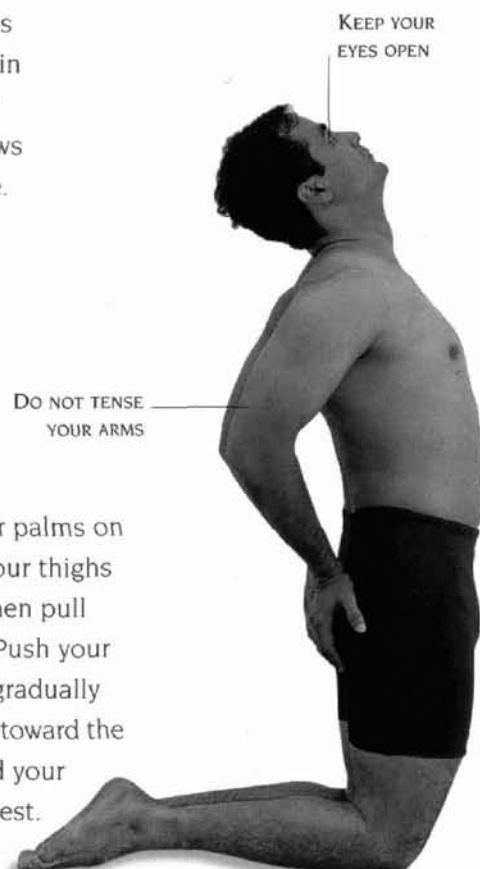


KEEP YOUR
BACK STRAIGHT

REST YOUR TOES
ON THE FLOOR

1 Kneel on the floor with your arms by your sides. Keep your thighs, knees, and feet together. Rest on the front of your feet, with the toes pointing to the back. Keep your torso upright and breathe evenly.

BEGINNERS If keeping your knees together leads to a feeling of strain in your thighs, practise with your knees slightly apart. This also allows for a freer movement of the spine.



KEEP YOUR
EYES OPEN

DO NOT TENSE
YOUR ARMS

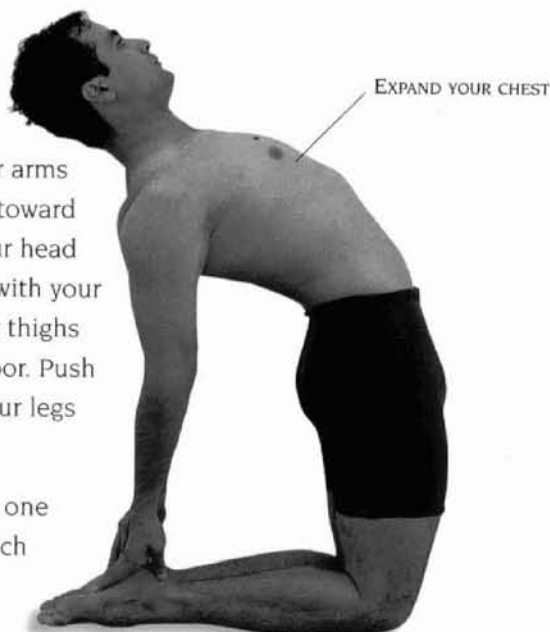
2 Exhale, and place your palms on your buttocks. Push your thighs forward slightly and then pull them up toward your groin. Push your spine into your body. Then, gradually bend your back, and lower it toward the floor. Simultaneously, extend your ribcage and broaden your chest. Continue to breathe evenly.

BENEFITS

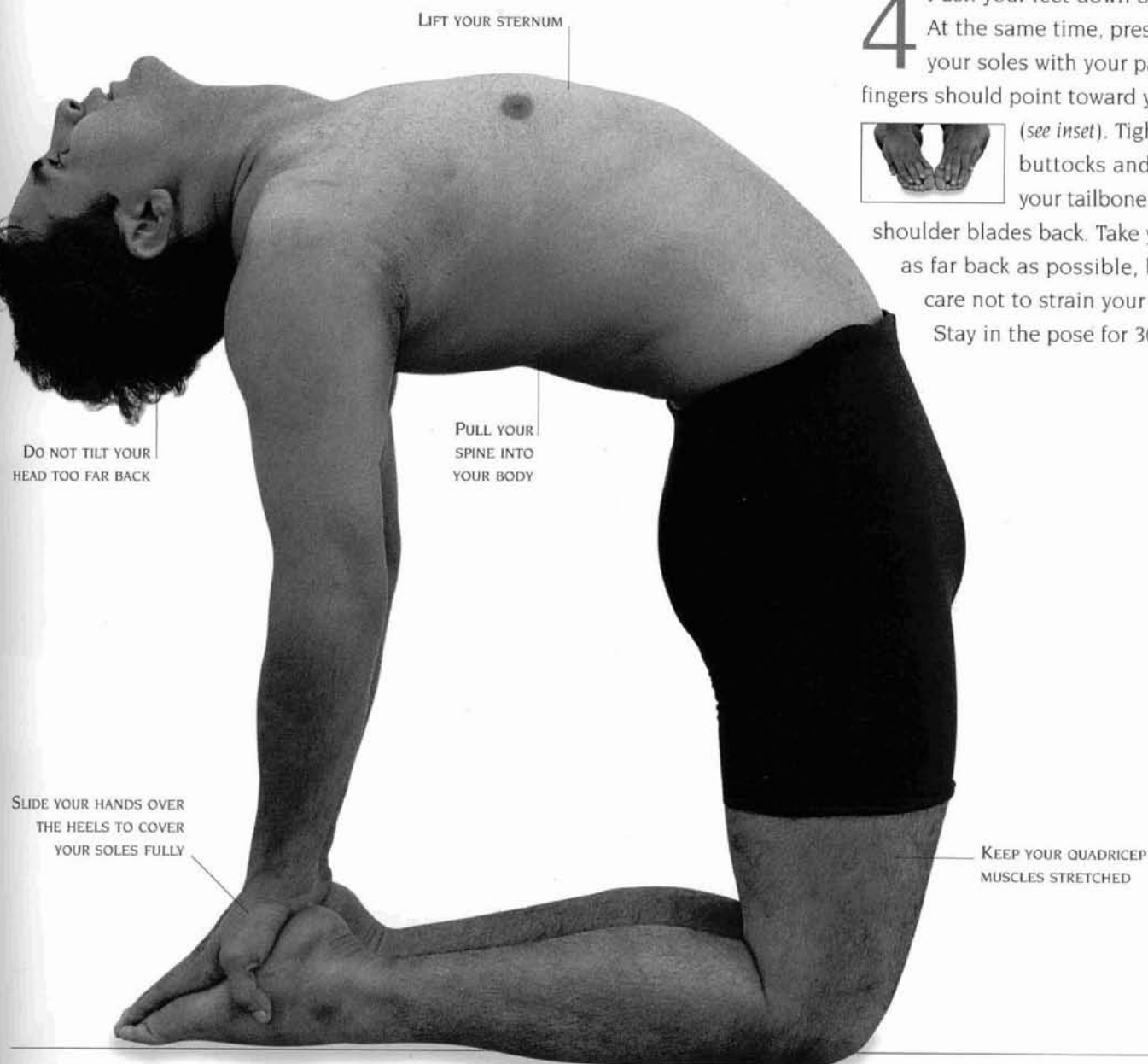
- ◆ Helps to correct posture
- ◆ Increases lung capacity
- ◆ Improves blood circulation to all the organs of the body
- ◆ Tones the muscles of the back and spine
- ◆ Removes stiffness in the shoulders, back, and ankles
- ◆ Relieves abdominal cramps
- ◆ Regulates menstrual flow

3 Push your shoulders back and stretch your arms from your shoulders toward your feet. Inhale, throw your head back, and hold both heels with your hands. Make sure that your thighs are perpendicular to the floor. Push your spine down toward your legs and breathe evenly.

BEGINNERS Initially, hold one heel at a time by tilting each shoulder individually.



4 Push your feet down on the floor. At the same time, press down on your soles with your palms. Your fingers should point toward your toes (see inset). Tighten your buttocks and pull in your tailbone. Push your shoulder blades back. Take your head as far back as possible, but take care not to strain your throat. Stay in the pose for 30 seconds.



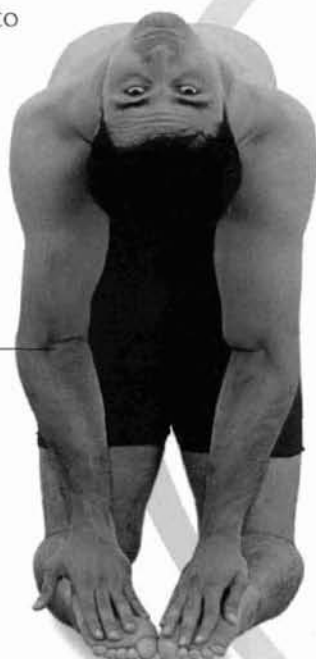
Ustrasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

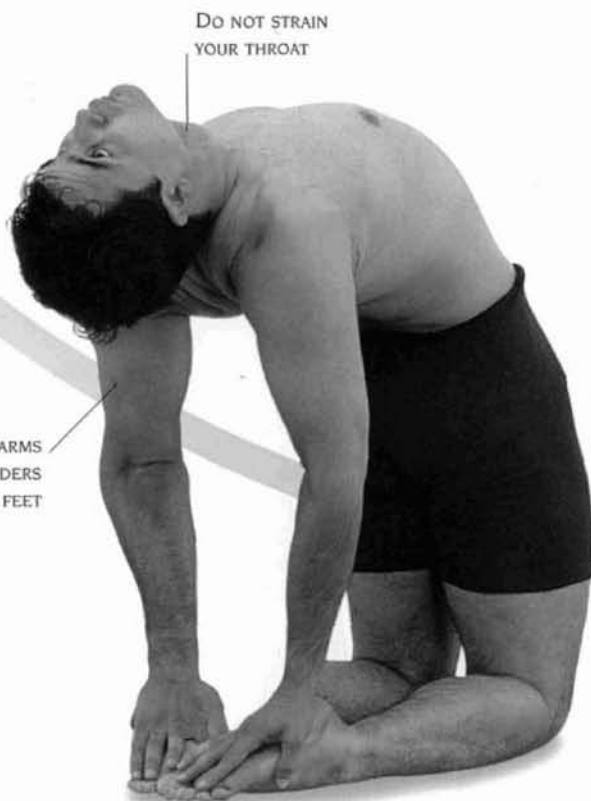
Push your shins down on the floor, and press your palms down on your soles. Lift and stretch the length of your spine, so that your body forms an arch. Your chest, armpits, and back should coil inward, as this will support the back of your chest. Consciously suck in your back ribs, and feel your kidneys being drawn in and squeezed. Try to create a space first between the dome of the diaphragm and the navel; and second, between the navel and the groin. By doing this, you will be extending your abdominal and pelvic organs, as well as your intestines. Roll the inner sides of your upper arms to the front and the outer sides of your upper arms to the back. Keep your elbow joints locked. Breathe evenly.



KEEP THE FRONT
OF YOUR FEET ON
THE FLOOR



LOCK YOUR ELBOWS

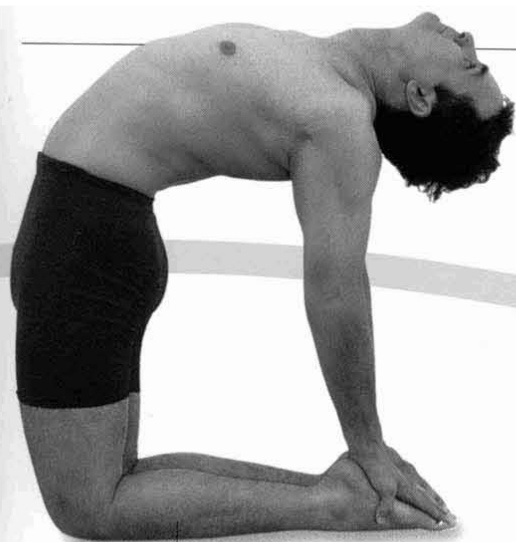


DO NOT STRAIN
YOUR THROAT

EXTEND YOUR ARMS
FROM YOUR SHOULDERS
TO YOUR FEET

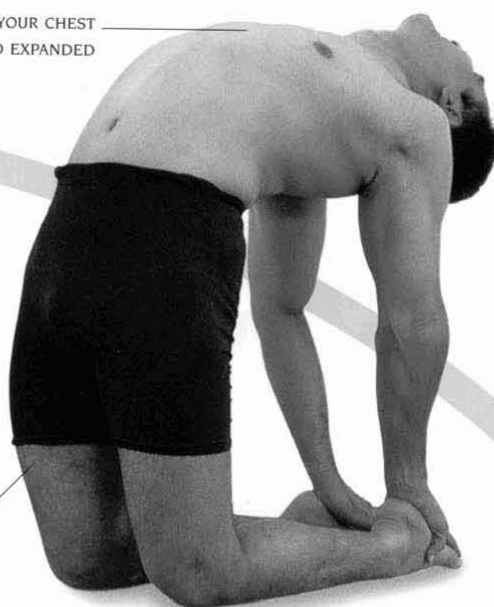
COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Exhale, and lessen the pressure of your palms on the feet. Raise your torso, keeping your arms by your sides. The impetus for the upward movement should come from the thighs and chest. If you cannot raise both your arms together, lift them, one by one.



EXTEND YOUR SHINS

KEEP YOUR CHEST
RAISED AND EXPANDED



PUSH YOUR THIGHS
OUT AND UPWARD

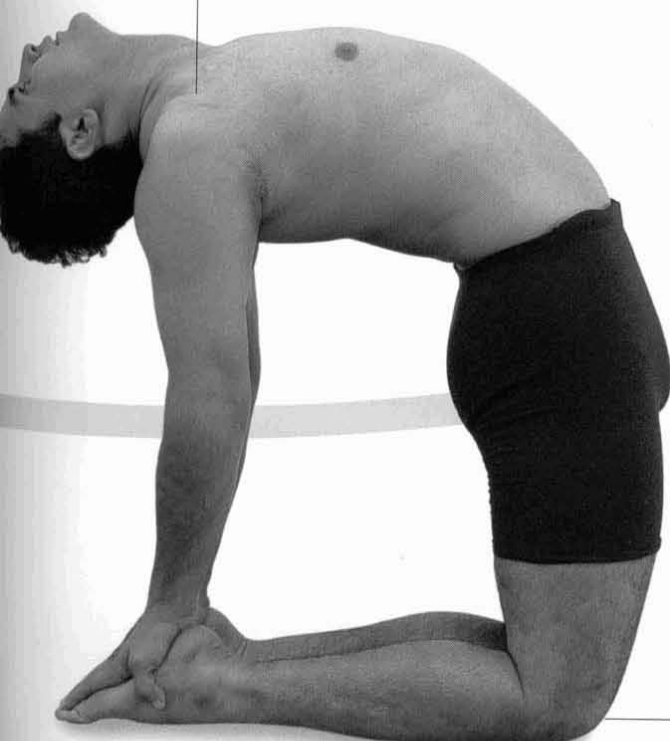
STRETCH THE
ABDOMINAL MUSCLES



CREATE SPACE BETWEEN
YOUR DIAPHRAGM
AND NAVEL



PUSH YOUR
COLLAR BONES BACK



ऊर्ध्व धनुरासन

Urdhva Dhanurasana

- Bow pose -



YOUR BODY ARCHES back to form an extended bow in this asana. *Urdhva* means "upward" in Sanskrit, while *dhanur* translates as "bow". Regular practice of Urdhva Dhanurasana keeps your body supple, and creates a feeling of vitality and lightness. The asana stimulates the adrenal glands, strengthening your will power, and increasing your capacity to bear stress.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if your blood pressure is too high or too low. Avoid this pose if you have constipation or diarrhoea, or when you are feeling tired. Do not practise during an attack of migraine or a severe headache. If you have a cardiac condition or ischaemia, practise Viparita Dandasana (see page 220) instead of this pose.



1 Lie on your back on the floor. Bend both knees and pull your heels to your buttocks. Spread your feet, so that they align with your hips. Bend your elbows and bring them over your head. Place your palms on the floor, on either side of your head. Your fingers should point toward your shoulders.

BEGINNERS At first, you may find it difficult to bring your heels close to your buttocks. Use your hands to pull the feet into position.

2 Focus on your palms and feet, as you are going to use them to launch your pose. Push your shoulder blades back, and pull the muscles of your back into your body. Exhale, then lift your torso and buttocks off the floor. Breathe evenly.



KEEP YOUR SHOULDERS ON THE FLOOR



3 Lift your chest and place the crown of your head on the floor. Take two breaths. Exhale sharply, and suck in your back and buttocks. Shift your weight from your palms to the front of your feet, and push up your torso in one single movement. Adjust your pose until your weight is equally distributed on your hands and feet.

BENEFITS

Prevents the arteries of the heart from thickening, and ensures healthy blood circulation throughout the body

Tones the spine

Strengthens the abdominal and pelvic organs

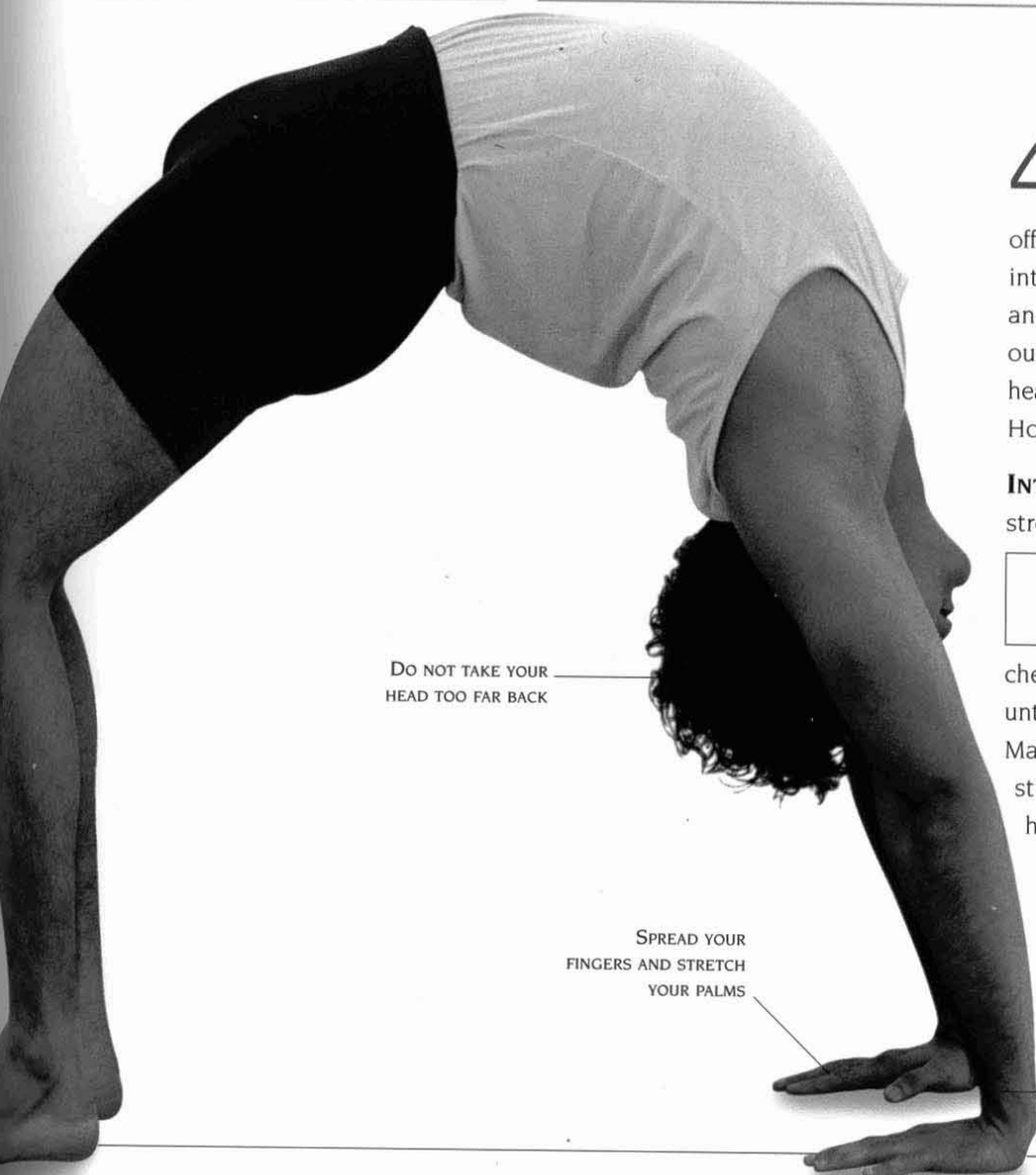
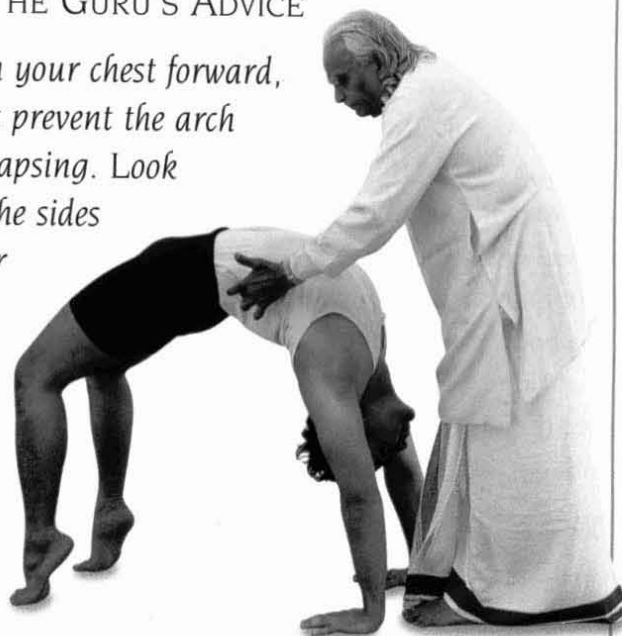
Stimulates the pituitary, pineal, and thyroid glands

Prevents prolapse of the uterus

Helps to prevent excess menstrual flow and eases menstrual cramps

THE GURU'S ADVICE

"Do not merely push your chest forward, as this alone will not prevent the arch of the torso from collapsing. Look at how I am lifting the sides of my student's lower ribcage. You must lift both sides of your chest up toward the ceiling."



DO NOT TAKE YOUR HEAD TOO FAR BACK

SPREAD YOUR FINGERS AND STRETCH YOUR PALMS

KEEP YOUR WRISTS FIRM AND STEADY

4 Push your body further upward. Press both palms and soles down on the floor and lift your head off the floor. Exhale, then pull your spine into your body. Straighten your arms and lock your elbows, sucking in the outer arms at the elbows. Now, take your head back without straining your throat. Hold the pose for 5-10 seconds.

INTERMEDIATES For a more effective stretch, exhale, pull the muscles of your thighs upward, and lift your heels off the floor (see inset). Extend your chest and push up your lower spine, until your abdomen is as taut as a drum. Maintain the height of your body, and stretch all your joints. Then bring your heels back to the floor.

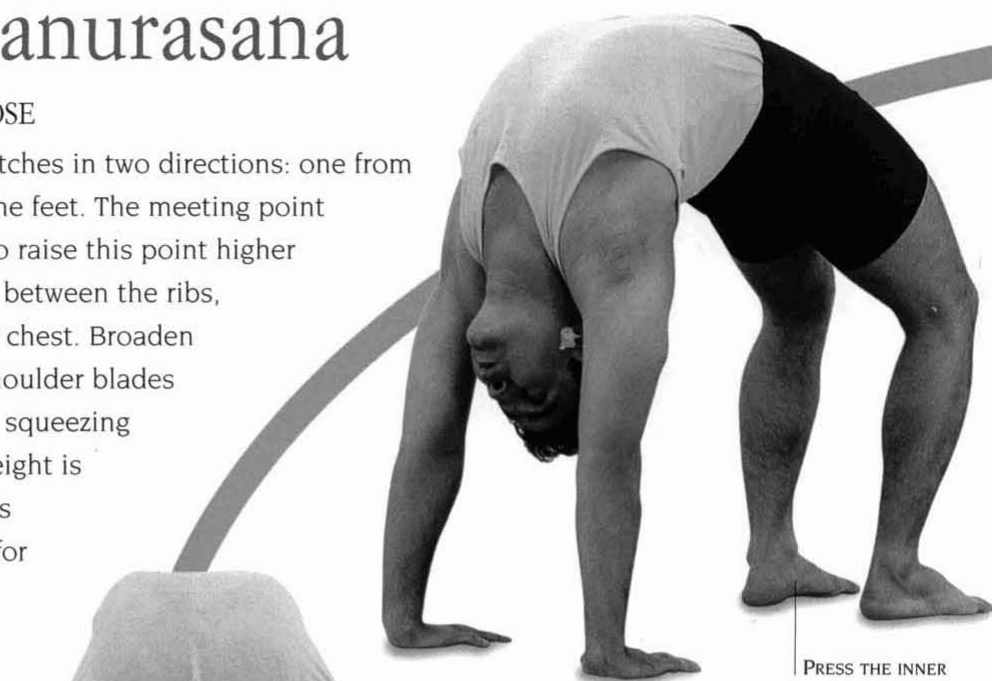


ऊर्ध्व धनुरासन

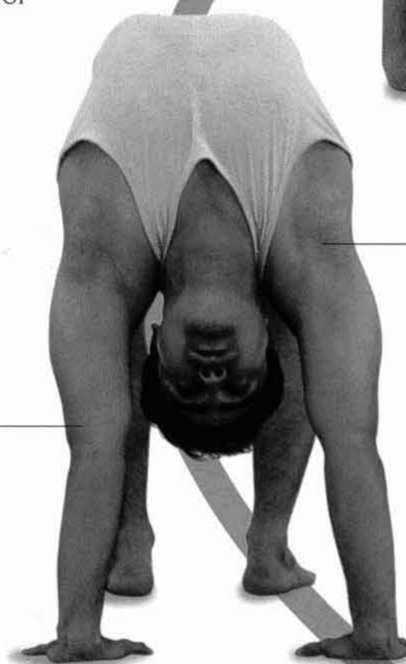
Urdhva Dhanurasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

In the final pose, your body stretches in two directions: one from the palms, and the other from the feet. The meeting point is at the base of the spine. Try to raise this point higher and higher. Open up the spaces between the ribs, especially at the bottom of your chest. Broaden your diaphragm. Suck in your shoulder blades and back ribs – imagine you are squeezing your kidneys. Make sure your weight is evenly distributed on your hands and feet. Initially, hold the pose for 5-10 seconds, breathing evenly. With practice, repeat the asana 3 to 5 times. This will bring greater freedom of movement to your body and improve the effectiveness of your stretch.



PRESS THE INNER
EDGES OF YOUR FEET
DOWN ON THE FLOOR



OPEN OUT
YOUR ARMPITS

STRETCH YOUR ARMS
FROM THE WRISTS
TO THE ARMPITS

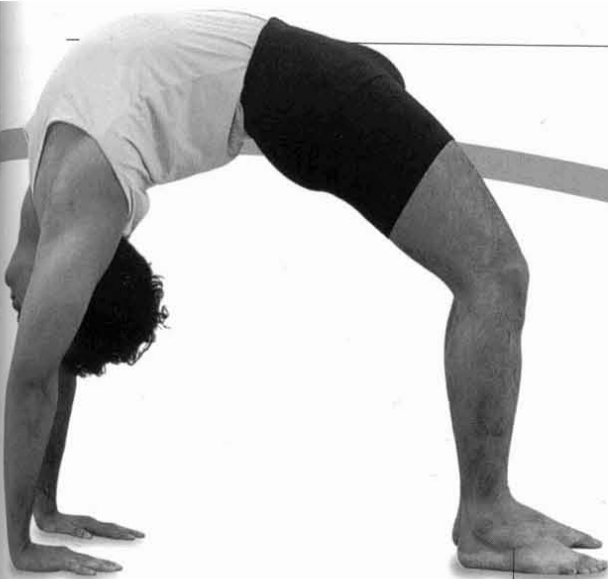


MOVE YOUR CHEST
TOWARD YOUR HEAD

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Exhale, and bend your elbows and knees. Lower your torso, then bring the crown of your head down to the floor. Lower your back and buttocks to the floor. Lie on your back and take a few breaths.

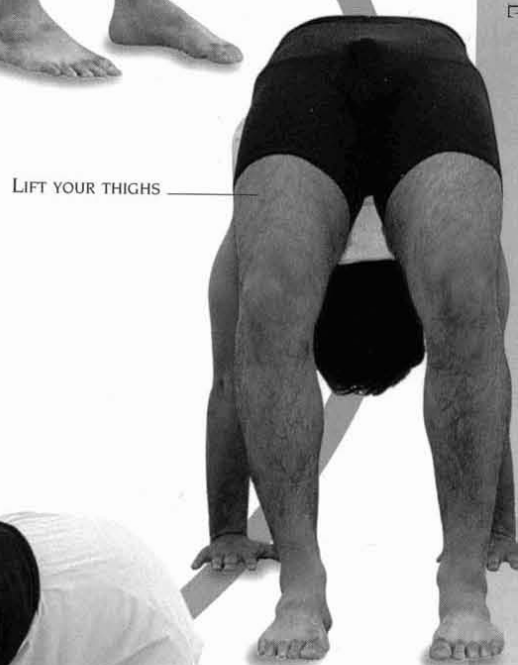
PULL YOUR SHINS UP
TOWARD YOUR THIGHS



KEEP YOUR FEET
PARALLEL TO
EACH OTHER



SPREAD YOUR FINGERS



LIFT YOUR THIGHS

BROADEN YOUR CHEST
ON BOTH SIDES
OF THE STERNUM



SPREAD OUT YOUR TOES

Reclining Asanas

*“Feel the inner mind touching
your entire body – even the
remotest parts where the mind does
not normally reach.”*





सुप्त वीरासन

Supta Virasana

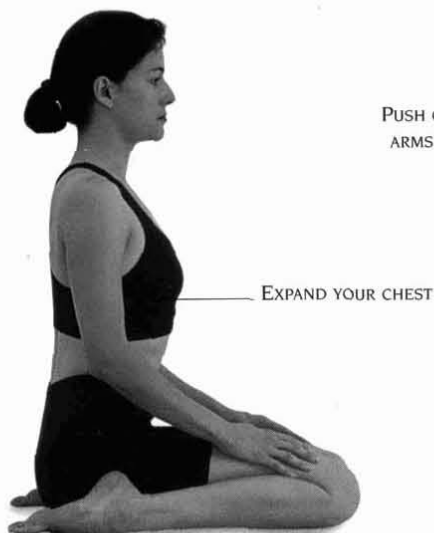
- Reclining hero stretch -



THIS IS A VARIATION OF the sitting pose, Virasana (see page 84). In this asana, you rest your torso on the floor. *Supta* means "lying down" in Sanskrit, while *vira* translates as "hero" or "champion". Athletes, and all those who are on their feet for long periods, will find this asana helpful, as the legs receive an intense and invigorating stretch. If you practise this pose last thing at night, your legs will feel rested and rejuvenated in the morning.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have a cardiac condition, lower backache, or osteoarthritis of the knees. Those with gout, arthritis of the ankles, or spinal disc disorders should practise with props (see page 228). Women should place a bolster under the back during menstruation (see page 228).



PUSH OUT YOUR
ARMS SLIGHTLY



ENSURE THAT YOUR KNEES
REMAIN TOGETHER

2 Hold your toes. Adjust your legs by slightly turning in your thighs and turning out your calves. Exhale, and lower your back gradually toward the floor. Rest your elbows, one by one, on the floor. Breathe evenly.

1 Sit in Virasana (see page 84). Keep both knees together and spread your feet about 0.5m (18in) apart, until they rest beside your hips. To avoid strain, ensure that the inner side of each calf touches the outer side of each thigh. Turn your soles toward the ceiling. Each of your toes should rest on the floor. Stretch your ankles fully and extend the soles toward the toes. Let the energy flow in both directions through your feet.



KEEP YOUR THIGHS
SLIGHTLY APART

3 Place the crown of your head on the floor. Now, lower your shoulders and upper torso to rest your head, and then your back, on the floor. Stretch your arms along your sides. Press your wrists against your soles.

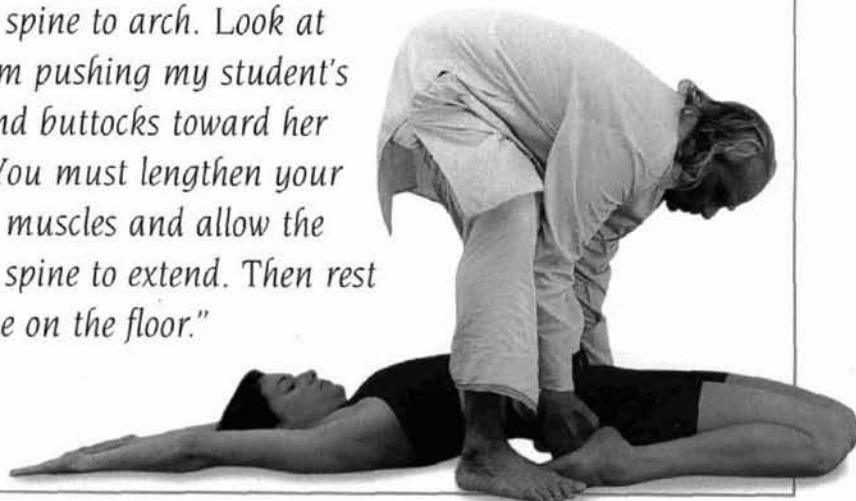


BENEFITS

- ◆ Helps to reduce cardiac disorders
- ◆ Stretches the abdomen, back, and waist
- ◆ Relieves rheumatism and pain in the upper and middle back
- ◆ Aids digestion after a heavy meal
- ◆ Soothes acidity and stomach ulcers
- ◆ Relieves the symptoms of asthma
- ◆ Reduces menstrual pain, and helps treat disorders of the ovaries

THE GURU'S ADVICE

"Do not push your buttocks toward the spine, since this causes your lumbar spine to arch. Look at how I am pushing my student's waist and buttocks toward her knees. You must lengthen your buttock muscles and allow the lumbar spine to extend. Then rest the spine on the floor."



PRESS YOUR
HEELS DOWN WITH
YOUR FINGERS

4 Move your elbows out to the sides and lie flat on the floor, until the spine is fully extended. Bring your head down and spread your shoulders away from your neck. Rest your shoulder blades and knees on the floor.

EXPAND YOUR CHEST
EVENLY ON EITHER SIDE
OF THE STERNUM

5 Take your arms over your head and stretch them out behind you on the floor, with your palms facing the ceiling. Ensure that both shoulder blades remain flat on the floor and do not let your buttocks or knees lift off the floor. Release your back and allow it to descend completely to the floor. If your back arches, it causes stress to the lower back. Press your thighs together, taking care not to jerk your knees. Breathe evenly and stay in the pose for 30-60 seconds.



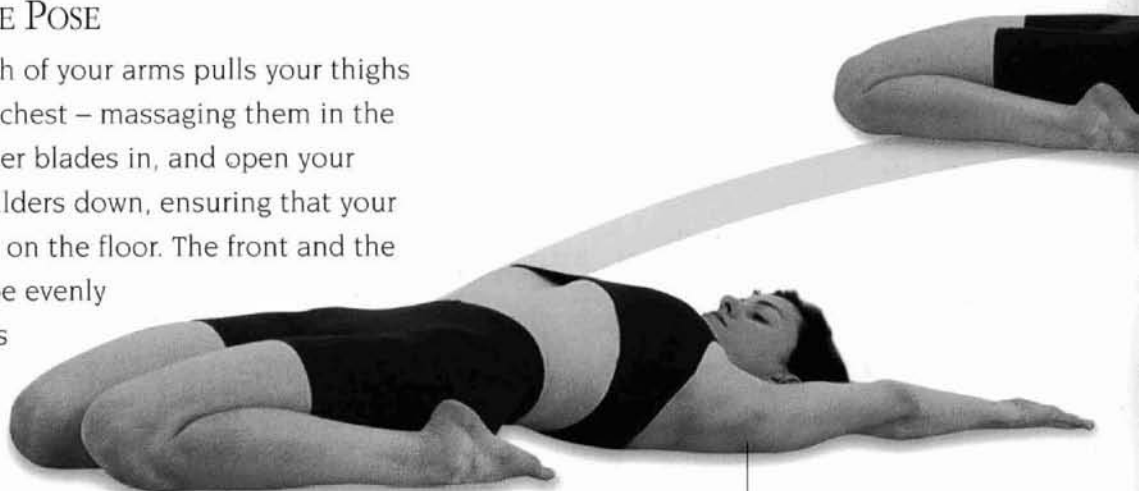
STRAIGHTEN YOUR ARMS AND
KEEP THEM FLAT ON THE FLOOR

THE INNER SIDES OF YOUR
FEET MUST TOUCH YOUR HIPs

Supta Virasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

In the final pose, the stretch of your arms pulls your thighs and abdomen toward your chest – massaging them in the process. Move both shoulder blades in, and open your chest fully. Press your shoulders down, ensuring that your knees and buttocks remain on the floor. The front and the back of your body should be evenly elongated and your armpits fully stretched. Push your pelvis toward the knees and press it down on the floor. Focus on your back ribs. Consciously extend them toward your head. Gradually, increase the time spent in the pose to 5-7 minutes.



TUCK IN YOUR
SHOULDER BLADES



PRESS YOUR SHINS
DOWN ON THE FLOOR

*“When the
and still, when*



PUSH YOUR
THIGHS TOGETHER

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Bring your hands over your head and hold your ankles. Lift your head and torso off the floor, supporting yourself on your elbows. Sit up in Virasana. Exhale and straighten your legs, one at a time. Sit in Dandasana.





PUSH YOUR BACK TOWARD
YOUR HEAD — DO NOT
ALLOW IT TO ARCH



DO NOT ALLOW YOUR
ELBOWS TO TURN OUT

KEEP BOTH SHOULDERS IN
CONTACT WITH THE FLOOR

*mind is controlled
remains is the soul."*



MAKE SURE
YOUR CHEST
REMAINS EXPANDED



ENSURE THAT YOUR
PALMS ARE OPEN AND FLAT

REST THE FRONT OF
YOUR FEET ON THE FLOOR



KEEP YOUR KNEES
PRESSED DOWN

शवासन

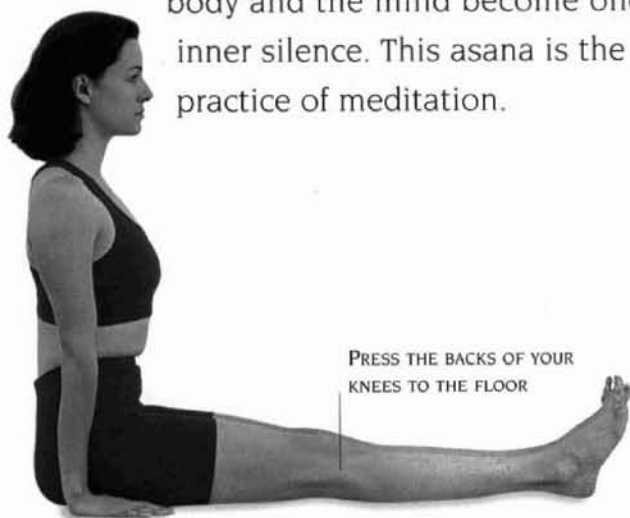
Savasana

- Corpse pose -



IN THIS ASANA, the body is kept as motionless as a corpse and the mind is alert, yet calm. The word *sava* means "corpse" in Sanskrit. Savasana removes fatigue and soothes the mind. Each part of the body is positioned properly to achieve total relaxation.

When you practise this asana, your organs of perception – the eyes, ears, and tongue – withdraw from the outside world. The body and the mind become one, and you experience inner silence. This asana is the first step in the practice of meditation.



1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Push the flesh of your buttocks out to the sides, so that your weight is equally distributed on both buttock bones. Breathe evenly.

ENSURE THAT YOUR BACK IS STRAIGHT



2 Bend your knees and bring your heels closer to the buttocks. Hold the tops of your shins and press your buttock bones down on the floor. Check that your back is straight.

KEEP THE HEAD STRAIGHT – DO NOT TILT IT TO ONE SIDE



SPREAD THE COLLAR BONES OUT TO THE SIDES



3 To lower your torso toward the floor, place your forearms and palms on the floor and lean back on your elbows. Do not move your feet, knees, or buttocks.

KEEP THE TORSO STILL AS
YOU STRAIGHTEN THE LEGS



4 Lower your torso to the floor, vertebra by vertebra, until the back of your head rests on the floor. Turn your palms to face the ceiling. Close your eyes, then straighten your legs, one by one.

INTERMEDIATES Stretch your torso away from your hips to straighten the spine. Extend the spine fully and keep it flat on the floor. Make sure that the stretch along the legs and the torso is equal on both sides of the body.

BENEFITS

◆
Helps to alleviate nervous tension, migraine, insomnia, and chronic fatigue syndrome

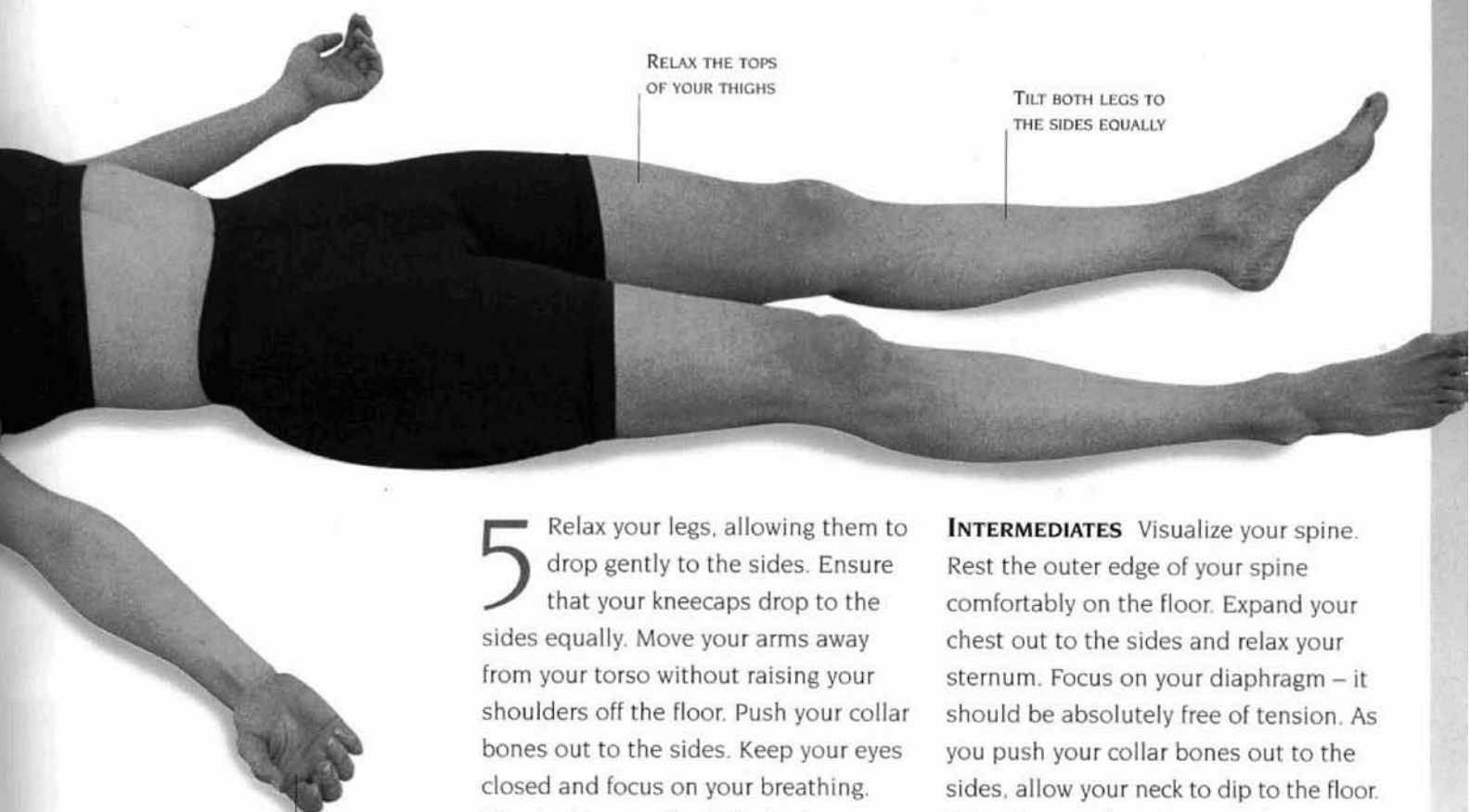
◆
Relaxes the body and eases breathing

◆
Soothes the nervous system and brings peace of mind

◆
Enhances recovery from all long-term or serious illnesses

RELAX THE TOPS
OF YOUR THIGHS

TILT BOTH LEGS TO
THE SIDES EQUALLY



5 Relax your legs, allowing them to drop gently to the sides. Ensure that your kneecaps drop to the sides equally. Move your arms away from your torso without raising your shoulders off the floor. Push your collar bones out to the sides. Keep your eyes closed and focus on your breathing. Stay in this pose for 5-7 minutes.

INTERMEDIATES Visualize your spine. Rest the outer edge of your spine comfortably on the floor. Expand your chest out to the sides and relax your sternum. Focus on your diaphragm – it should be absolutely free of tension. As you push your collar bones out to the sides, allow your neck to dip to the floor. Relax the muscles of your neck.

RELAX THE FINGERS
AND THE CENTRES
OF THE PALMS

Savasana

ADVANCED WORK IN THE POSE

As your neck dips to the floor (see Step 5, page 151), you will feel a soothing sensation in the back of your brain. When this area of the brain relaxes, move on to the front of the brain. From the crown of the head, the energy should descend in a spiral action toward the bridge of the nose, and down to a point located at the sternum. When the energy reaches this point, the three layers and five sheaths that comprise your body (see page 24) come together and are integrated into a single, harmonious whole. This is the ultimate aim of Savasana.

RELAX YOUR CHEEKS,
JAW, AND MOUTH

ENSURE THAT BOTH LEGS
TILT OUT EQUALLY TO
THE SIDES

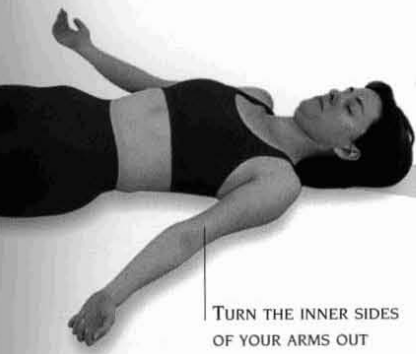
*“Relaxation
outer layer of the
deep layer*

COMING OUT OF THE POSE

Slowly bring your awareness back into contact with your surroundings. Open your eyes.

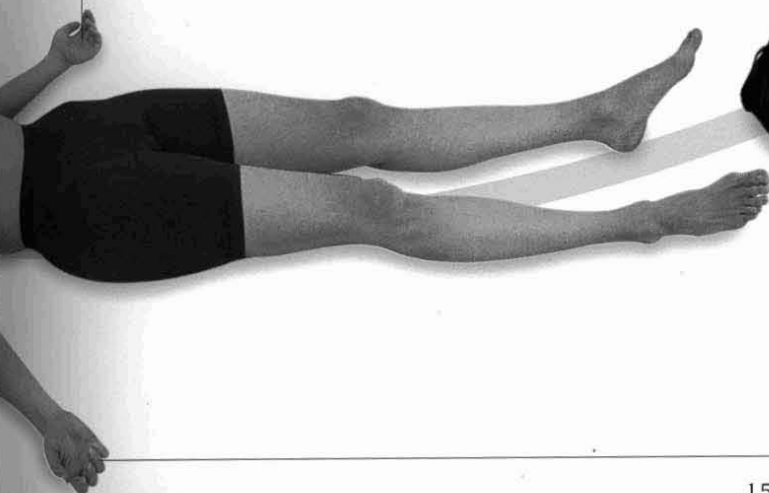
Bend your right knee and roll on to your right side. Push yourself up on your right arm and come to a cross-legged sitting position.

KEEP THE BACK OF THE
NECK ON THE FLOOR



*begins from the
body and penetrates the
of our existence."*

RELAX YOUR FINGERS
AND PALMS



ALLOW THE EYEBALLS
TO SINK DEEP INTO
THEIR SOCKETS







*“An intellectual mind that is
unconnected to the heart is an
uncultivated mind.”*

Yoga for Stress

The practice of asanas and pranayama is not only the most effective, but also the most natural therapy for stress. Practised together, they generate enormous amounts of energy in the body, stimulating the cells and relaxing tense muscles. The effect on the mind takes longer to register because yoga deals with the causes, and not just the symptoms of stress. With regular practice, the senses that divert the mind to the external environment are drawn inward, calming the restless mind. When your stress levels are high, it is sometimes hard to achieve the final pose effectively. In this case, practising with the recommended props helps you to attain the benefits of the asanas in a relaxed manner.

Understanding Stress

Stress is as old as civilization itself. The ancient sages understood the impact on the mind and body of the turmoil of daily life. Yoga helps to detach the mind from this turmoil and allows you to face the effects of stress with equilibrium.

We experience stress from the moment of birth, and spend our lives adjusting to it. Some of us manage better than others for a variety of reasons. It could be because of one's personality, environment, or one's physical condition. But everyone has to deal with the effects of stress at some time or another, and in order to do so, he or she has to cultivate and discipline the mind, the physical body, psychological body, and spiritual body. We all evolve ways of coping with stress, checking and minimizing its effects with varying degrees of success. Yoga provides one of the most comprehensive and effective solutions to this problem.

Stress is not a modern phenomenon; it has always been with us. Our ancestors may not have had to deal with the

same pressures that those of us who live in modern, technologically advanced cultures do, but even the ordinary events of daily life can cause inner turmoil. People have sought solutions for stress ever since civilization began.

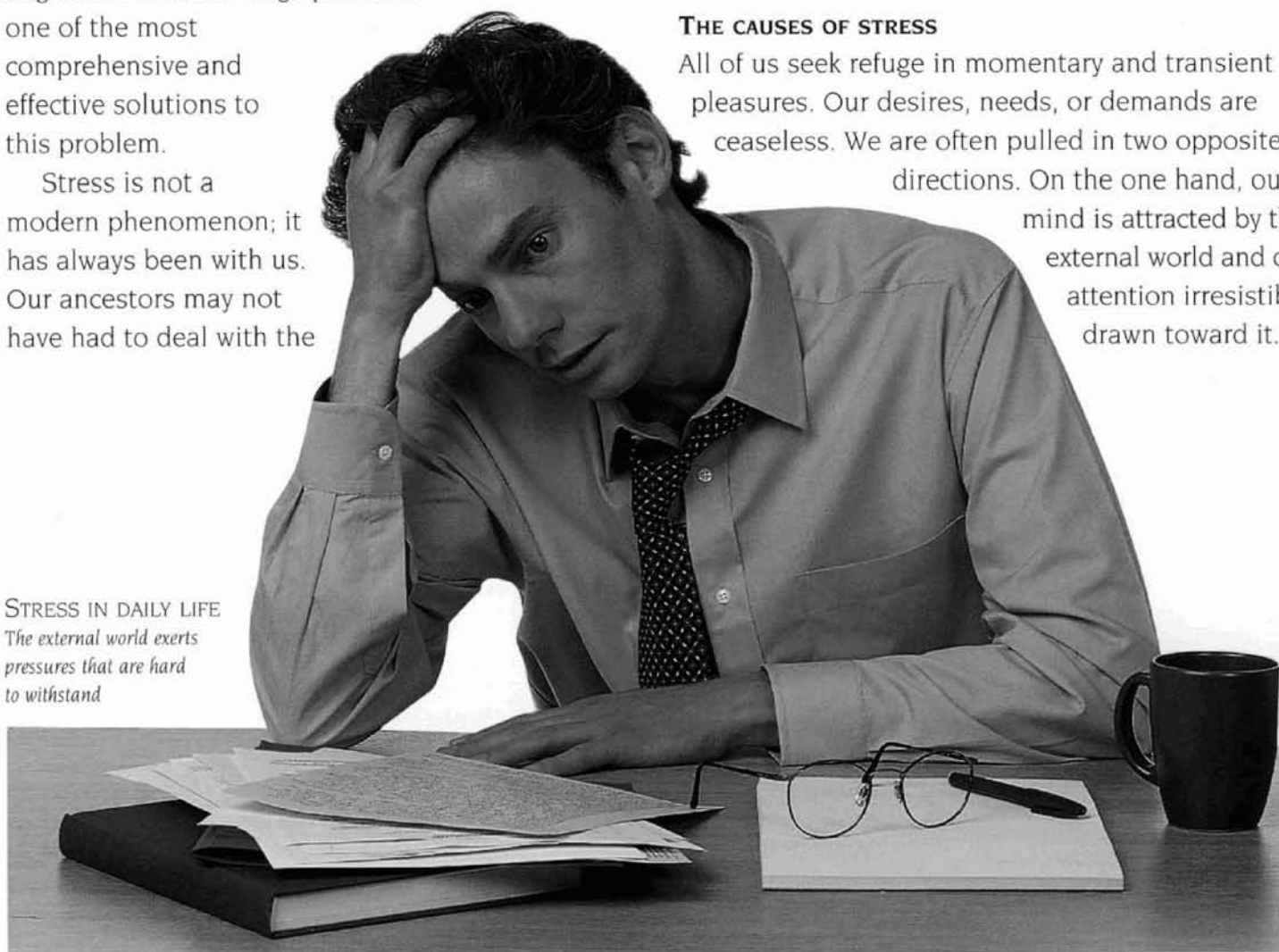
Patanjali's understanding of stress led him to begin the *Yoga Sutras* with the phrase, "*Chittavritti niruddha*". This translates as "controlling the thought waves or mental fluctuations which bring about stress". He goes on to describe how the path of yoga can help to cope with stressful situations.

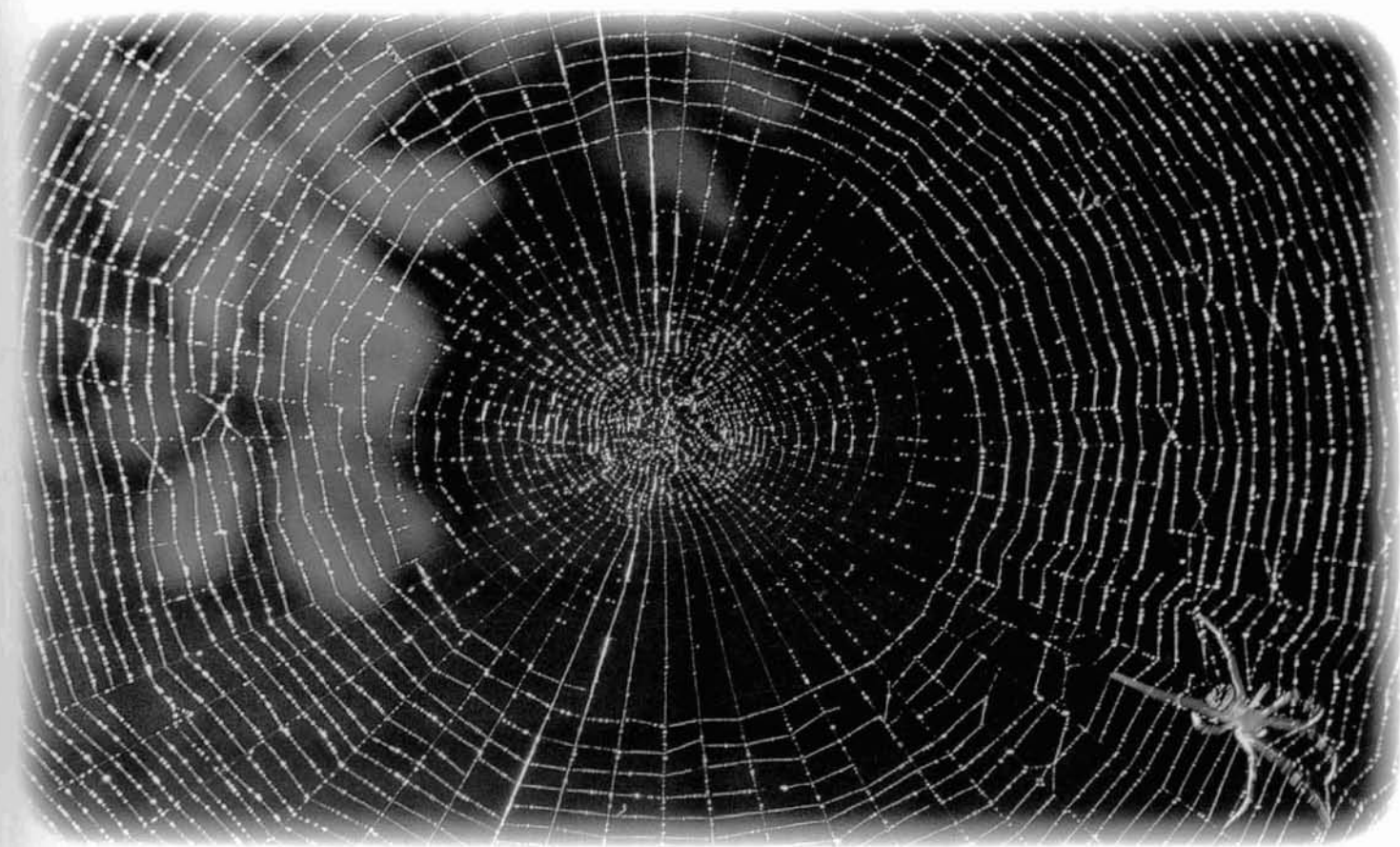
THE CAUSES OF STRESS

All of us seek refuge in momentary and transient pleasures. Our desires, needs, or demands are ceaseless. We are often pulled in two opposite directions. On the one hand, our mind is attracted by the external world and our attention irresistibly drawn toward it.

STRESS IN DAILY LIFE

The external world exerts pressures that are hard to withstand





STRESS CONFUSES THE MIND

Our senses often betray us, trapping us in a web of avarice and discontent, from which it is difficult to escape

On the other, we yearn to look inward, to discover the core of our being and our inner self. This conflict entangles us in a web of desire, dissatisfaction, and anger, and manifests itself in feelings of anguish, exhaustion, and breathlessness.

CONTROLLING THE SENSES

The senses are directly controlled by the mind. To control the senses, therefore, you must control the mind. By relaxing our senses and turning them inward, we can detach them from the mind. When a person is calm, and his or her state of mind is meditative, the senses are under control. At this point, external events cease to cause stress. It is only then

that one can reflect on the emotional forces controlling one's life and analyse what should be discarded, what should change. The practice of yoga harmonizes your body and mind. The steady pace and rhythm of breath relaxes the body and detaches the mind from the worries of the external world. This healing effect can then be felt in your daily life when routine activities are performed efficiently and well.

A relaxed person possesses dynamic energy that does not dissipate. In this state of being, none of the common symptoms of stress, such as migraine, fatigue, or hypertension occur. Whatever the external environment may be, the mind remains cool and collected, and the body remains free from disease.

*“We can rise above our limitations,
only once we recognize them.”*

The Modern World

The technological and scientific advances of the modern world do not automatically bring happiness. If anything, modern life has led to greater levels of stress, as people are unthinkingly caught up in the pursuit of wealth, success, and worldly pleasures.

The information explosion has allowed access to more knowledge than ever before. Paradoxically, such scientific and technological advances have increased, rather than reduced stress levels. The pressures of financial security, the need for recognition and success, the desire for worldly pleasures, all push us into a spiral of anxiety and haste. Inevitably, our spiritual life, peace of mind, and our health suffer.

If you are caught up in the maelstrom of constant challenge and competition, you lose your ability to perceive reality clearly. You may unknowingly twist the truth to suit your own personal goals and fail to recognize friendliness, honesty, and compassion, and instead perceive deceit, dishonesty, or pride.

An intellectual mind, if unconnected with the heart, is an uncultivated mind. The intelligence of the head must be controlled to allow the emotional centre to awaken. It is only when the head and the heart are in harmony, that peace of mind, stability, and happiness can be achieved.



IN FRANTIC HASTE
The speed of modern life causes stress

Egoism and pride cause an individual to lose contact with his or her emotional centre. In order to achieve a fully integrated personality, you must develop emotionally as well as intellectually. Only then will you be able to control the stresses and strains which knock you off balance from time to time. As long as your heart and your mind remain separate, stress will manifest itself physically and emotionally through contracted body muscles, tense facial expressions, and undesirable behavioural patterns.

Food & Nourishment

The food we eat and the surroundings we inhabit must be conducive to stress-free living. If we increase our intake of fruit and vegetables, and nourish our senses with calming scents, sounds, and sights, we will be on the way to a healthier lifestyle.

The *Upanishads*, ancient Indian scriptures compiled between 300 and 400 BC, divide food into 16 categories: 10 parts are classified as wastage, 5 parts affect the energy of the mind, and one part is vital for the intelligence. In this scheme, food can have positive or negative effects, depending on the

immediate environment, the geographical and climatic conditions, and a person's constitution. Yogic science recognizes three different qualities of food: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Sattva* means "pure essence", and represents the well-balanced and meditative aspect; *rajas* is the energy which seeks to accomplish, achieve, or create; and *tamas* indicates inertia and decay.

Sattvic food, which includes fruit and vegetables, is pure, wholesome, and fresh. *Rajasic* foods, such as onions, garlic, and pungent spices, are stimulants. *Tamasic* substances, such as alcohol and meats, are considered to be heavy and enervating. Junk food is a relatively new term, but its properties would certainly be categorized as *tamasic*.

Every activity in our modern world is fast, and this includes activities related to food and the way we eat it. Junk food and food out of cans and packets has a tremendously negative impact on the body. The mind is as alert after a meal of *sattvic* food as it was before the food was eaten, but after meals which are largely *rajasic* or *tamasic* in nature, it becomes dull and sluggish. It is equally important to keep the mind healthy and the body well-nourished.

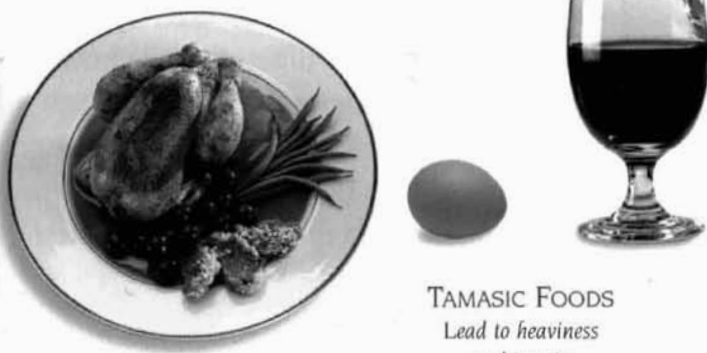
The five organs of perception, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin, are the gateways to the mind. For better control of the mind, the senses need appropriate nourishment. Soothing music for the ears, soft, natural light, or beautiful, peaceful scenery for the eyes, and fresh pure air and the scent of flowers for the nose, all help to nourish the mind. The tongue needs nutritious, delicately flavoured foods. The skin should be kept clean, soft, and supple. Finally, the mind must be nurtured by developing clarity of thought.



SATTVIC FOODS
Pure and nourishing



RAJASIC FOODS
Highly spiced and stimulating



TAMASIC FOODS
Lead to heaviness and inertia

Positive & Negative Stress

Stress can motivate an individual to develop creativity and to strive for achievement.

This is positive stress. Negative stress can lead to ill health, depression, and inertia.

Yoga teaches you to transform negative stress into positive stress.

The cumulative effects of stress can damage your health and undermine your emotional stability. Stress can paralyse, and make you feel fragmented and off balance. There is a growing awareness today that stress is a health hazard. But we should not forget that stress can also trigger the motivation to create and achieve. This type of stress can be positive, constructive, and healthy.

TYPES OF STRESS

We must distinguish clearly between positive stress and negative stress. Negative stress leads to the inability to adjust or react to illness, to feelings of uncertainty, or to certain harmful addictions. Negative stress, like some diseases, can remain dormant. It can be passive, but can also be active. The physical symptoms of negative stress include tremors or laboured breathing.

Though positive and negative stress are two sides of the same coin, one type of stress usually predominates. Every person must find a way to transform negative stress into positive energy, so that it can be harnessed to build a healthy mind and body. The mind, body, and emotions are affected by physical, physiological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual stress. The result may be tense or stiff muscles and joints, atrophying of skeletal bones, slowing down of body systems, or sluggishness in the vital organs. Emotional tension and muscular tension are closely related. Continuous stress causes habitual muscular

contraction, severe muscle and joint pain, and tightness in the jaw or facial muscles. If you suffer from stress, you may experience severe indigestion or irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, migraine, a feeling of constriction in the diaphragm, breathlessness, or insomnia.

REACTIONS TO STRESS

Different people respond to the same stressful situation with different levels of intensity. Some may become irritable or angry, others confused or depressed. Regardless of how stress manifests itself, and how one responds to it, ultimately stress leads to disease, premature ageing, or in extreme cases, fatal illness.

Turbulent emotions and physical ailments are directly connected. The science of psycho-neuro-immunology has established the connection between the body, mind, and emotions, a connection the ancient yogis recognized a millennium ago. According to yogic science, the health of the psyche is reflected in – and partly created by – the health of the body. Affliction and sorrow are often physiologically manifested as physical pain. Psychological pressures bring stress to bear on the anatomical body, the bodily organs, and on the nervous system.



POSITIVE ACTION

Stress can be harnessed to have a positive effect



HORIZONS OF PEACE AND CALM

Yoga helps you to see beyond the tension and strain of daily life

ALLEVIATING STRESS

To reduce stress, the body and mind cannot be treated as separate components. The tension associated with stress is stored mainly in the muscles, the diaphragm, and the nervous system. If these areas are relaxed, stress is reduced. Similarly, the organs of perception and the central nervous system react physically to stress. Yogic methods of deep relaxation have a profound effect on the central nervous system, as well as the circulatory,

respiratory, and digestive systems. When a part of the body is tense, circulation to that area is decreased, reducing immunity. Yoga works on that area to relieve tension and increase circulation. Blood flow to all parts of the body improves, stabilizing the heart rate and blood pressure. Rapid, shallow breathing becomes deep and slow, allowing a higher intake of oxygen, and removing stress from the body and the mind.

“Words cannot convey the value of yoga – it has to be experienced.”

Asanas & Stress

*The practice of asanas and pranayama is the most natural therapy for stress.
Practising asanas with props builds up your stamina and allows you to benefit
from the pose without unnecessary strain.*

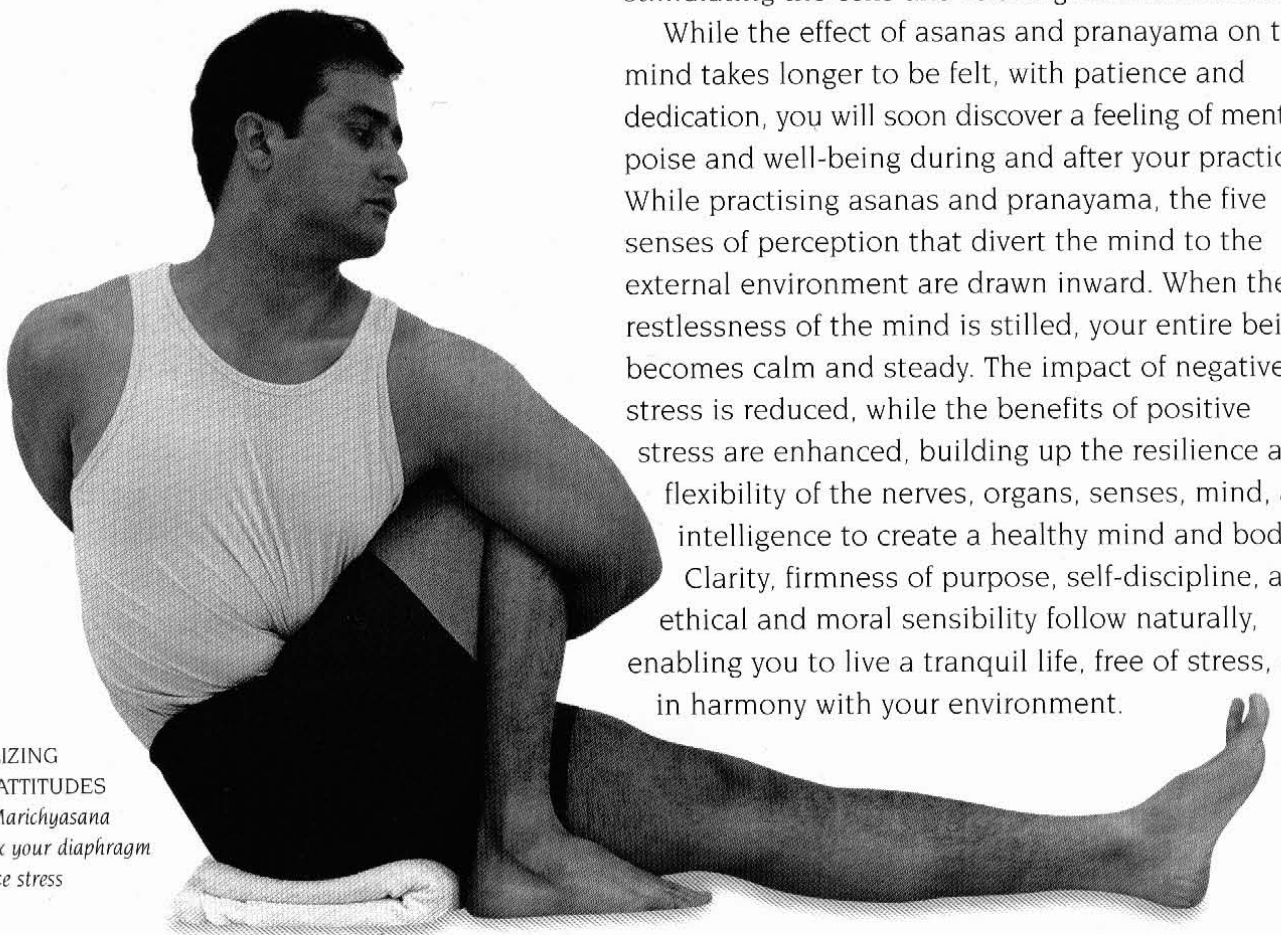
Many people respond to stress by resorting to tranquillizers, alcohol, nicotine, or comfort eating. These may bring momentary relief, but as we know all too well, they are only temporary solutions and are, in fact, counter-productive. They also have dangerous side effects that actually increase stress levels. Simple relaxation techniques can alleviate stress levels for a short time, but cannot tackle the causes of stress comprehensively.

The yogis and sages of the past have emphasized that emotional turmoil or anxiety have to be faced with calmness and stability. Yoga can help you to internalize those positive attitudes which allow you to face stressful situations with equanimity.

LEARNING TO DEAL WITH STRESS

Every individual has the power to discriminate between good habits and bad, and to develop his or her sense of ethical behaviour. By adopting good habits, such as regular yoga practice, you can check the stress that depletes the body's bio-energy. The practice of asanas and pranayama is not just the most effective, but also the most natural therapy for stress, and unlike many other therapies, there is no danger of harmful side effects. Mere relaxation is not sufficient in itself to counter the negative effects of stress. The regular practice of yoga, along with a healthy diet and lifestyle, helps to generate enormous amounts of energy in the body, stimulating the cells and relaxing tensed muscles.

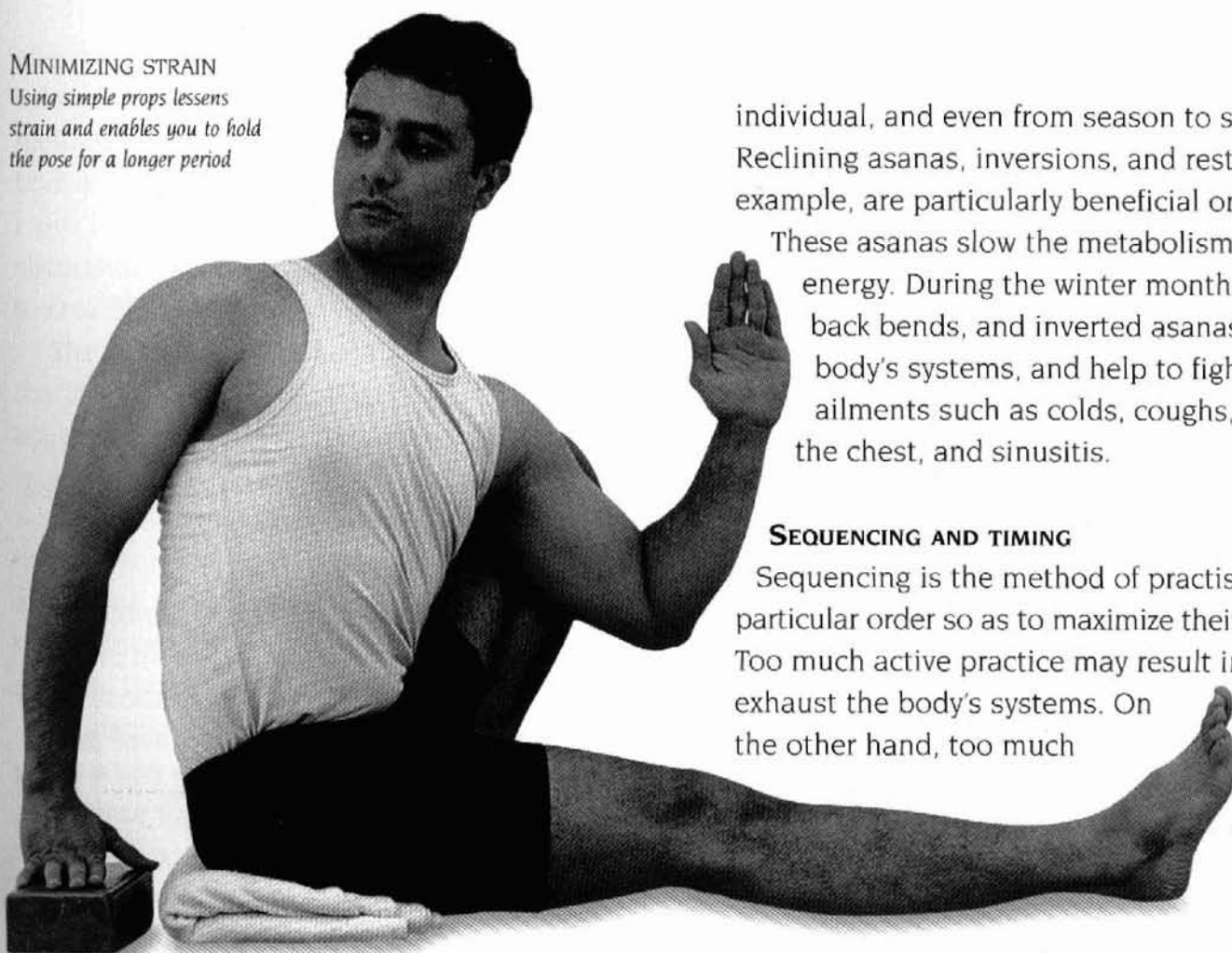
While the effect of asanas and pranayama on the mind takes longer to be felt, with patience and dedication, you will soon discover a feeling of mental poise and well-being during and after your practice. While practising asanas and pranayama, the five senses of perception that divert the mind to the external environment are drawn inward. When the restlessness of the mind is stilled, your entire being becomes calm and steady. The impact of negative stress is reduced, while the benefits of positive stress are enhanced, building up the resilience and flexibility of the nerves, organs, senses, mind, and intelligence to create a healthy mind and body. Clarity, firmness of purpose, self-discipline, and ethical and moral sensibility follow naturally, enabling you to live a tranquil life, free of stress, and in harmony with your environment.



INTERNALIZING
POSITIVE ATTITUDES
Practising Marichyasana
helps to relax your diaphragm
and so reduce stress

MINIMIZING STRAIN

Using simple props lessens strain and enables you to hold the pose for a longer period

**ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PRACTICE**

There are many different types of stress which we deal with every day – physical, psychological, and physiological. The only way to effectively combat the negative effects of these is through a balanced combination of active and passive practice. I use the term “passive practice” when talking of yoga with props, since this helps to promote calmness of the mind, patience, and endurance. “Active practice”, as the term suggests, is more vigorous, and generally refers to classical poses without the use of props. These poses, especially the standing poses and those involving back bends, help to build stamina, vitality, and flexibility. The balance between active and passive poses will vary from individual to

individual, and even from season to season.

Reclining asanas, inversions, and resting asanas, for example, are particularly beneficial on a hot day.

These asanas slow the metabolism, and conserve energy. During the winter months, standing, back bends, and inverted asanas stimulate the body's systems, and help to fight off common ailments such as colds, coughs, congestion in the chest, and sinusitis.

SEQUENCING AND TIMING

Sequencing is the method of practising asanas in a particular order so as to maximize their effectiveness. Too much active practice may result in egoism and exhaust the body's systems. On the other hand, too much

passive practice may lead to depression, lethargy, and feelings of restlessness and irritability. As you gradually discover more and more about yoga and about your own body, you will be able to adjust the sequences of your practice, to achieve the ideal blend of active and passive poses. As your stamina and flexibility increase, you will also be able to hold poses for longer periods. The effect of an asana cannot take place in seconds, and timing is dependent on energy, intelligence, and awareness.

ASANAS WITH PROPS

If you are experiencing high levels of stress, or if you have a minor injury, or are fatigued in any way, it is best for you to practise yoga using props.

*“The brain must be calm,
the body active.”*

Asanas with Props

The ancient yogis used logs of wood, stones, and ropes to help them to practise asanas effectively. Extending this principle, Yogacharya Iyengar invented props which allow asanas to be held easily and for a longer duration, without strain.

Yoga asanas involve extension, exertion, as well as relaxation of the body. More importantly, the aim of the movements is to align the body correctly. This also includes mental alignment, in which the mind touches each and every part of the body evenly.

The practice of yoga requires you to be in good mental and physical condition. Yet, during my long years of teaching yoga, I have found that even those

whether they are weak or strong, young or old, beginners or advanced students, or those who wish to conserve their energy because of fatigue or injury.

HOW PROPS HELP

A yoga prop is any object that helps to stretch, strengthen, relax, or improve the alignment of the body. It helps to sustain the practice of asanas for a longer duration, and conserves energy. These props



YOGACHARYA IYENGAR IN SETUBANDHA SARVANGASANA

This version of the pose requires considerable strength in the neck, shoulders, and back, requiring years of practice to achieve. It should not be attempted without supervision

in good condition occasionally find some poses difficult to sustain for the required length of time. Some asanas, too, entail body movements that are initially too complicated for even the healthiest students to attempt without help. It is for this reason that I developed the use of props in yoga. With these props, the practice of asanas has never been easier, less tiring, or more enjoyable, making each asana equally accessible to all yoga students,

allow asanas to be practised in a relaxed way, balancing the body and mind actively as well as passively. At first, I would use my own body to support my students during their practice, but found that this exhausted my own reserves of energy. I then began experimenting with ordinary, everyday objects such as walls, chairs, stools, blocks, bolsters, blankets, and belts to help my students achieve the final pose. As I worked with people who were

affected by illness or disease, I came to realize the value of props. I discovered that props helped to retain key movements and subtle adjustments of the body by providing more height, weight, or support. I also found that the use of props improved blood circulation and breathing capacity. This inspired me to create props adjusted to suit individual needs.

The yoga asana practised with props is unique in that it is the only form of exercise which allows both action and relaxation simultaneously. It activates the muscles, tones the body's organs, and relieves undue mental and physical stress or strain. Props help to increase flexibility and stamina and, at the same time, relax slack and tired muscles. They help to rejuvenate the entire body, without increasing physical fatigue.

Students of yoga find the practice of asanas with props a very encouraging exercise. It gives them the confidence to attempt difficult asanas, and ensures correct practice. Props provide a sense of direction and alignment, and help to increase and enhance the understanding of each asana. They serve as silent instructors.

PROPS AND THERAPY

When the body is lethargic, sluggish, and fatigued, practice with props works wonders. The nervous system relaxes, the brain is calmed, and the mind soothed. Asanas with props build up emotional stability and will power. As stress is reduced, anxiety, fears, and depression also disappear, helping those under emotional strain to cope better with all aspects of their lives. Blood circulation increases, and the heart, as well as the respiratory, abdominal, and pelvic organs are rested and rejuvenated. For instance, Setubandha Sarvangasana (see page 218) practised on a broad wooden bench increases coronary blood supply by resting and energizing the heart without any bodily strain. This makes it ideal for cardiac patients.

Asanas practised with the help of bolsters, blocks, stools, or chairs help to relieve many common ailments. They regulate blood pressure, ease breathlessness and asthma, and remove

stiffness in the back, hips, knees, and feet, alleviating rheumatism and arthritis. Yoga with props frees you from attachment to the body and liberates the spirit. It helps to improve posture and maintain balance, allowing you to stretch, and experience a state of relaxation during practice.

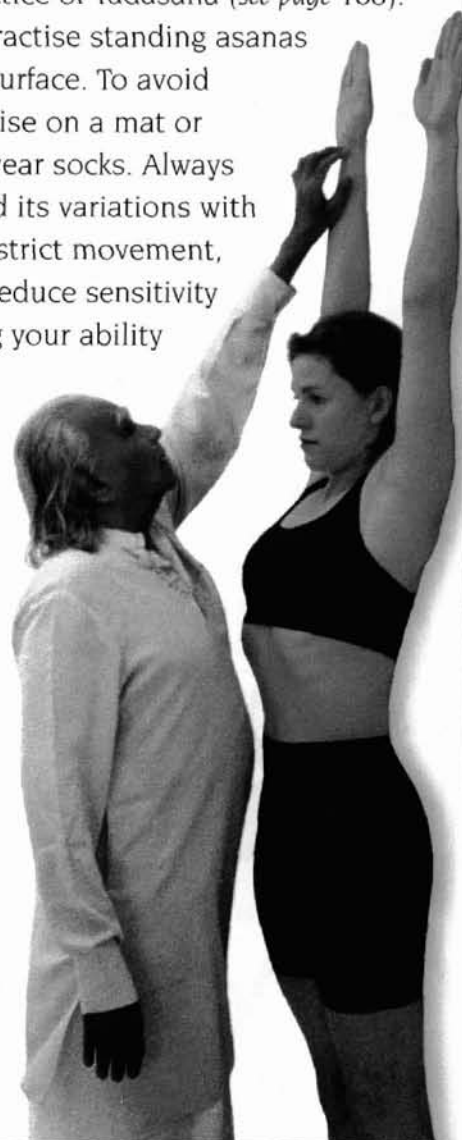
Ultimately, yoga with props creates a feeling of peace and tranquillity, culminating in a fresh perspective and renewed strength. Some of the props shown on the following pages have been specifically developed for your practice. Others are objects that you will find in your own homes.

PRACTICE AGAINST A WALL

The support of a wall helps to maintain balance and a sense of alignment, particularly in standing and inverted asanas. It gives you the confidence to practise without fear of injury or strain. The wall is invaluable in the practice of Tadasana (see page 168). Make sure that you practise standing asanas on an even, smooth surface. To avoid slipping, do not practise on a mat or blanket, and do not wear socks. Always practise Tadasana and its variations with bare feet, as shoes restrict movement, cramp the toes, and reduce sensitivity in the soles, impairing your ability to sense all the adjustments in the pose.

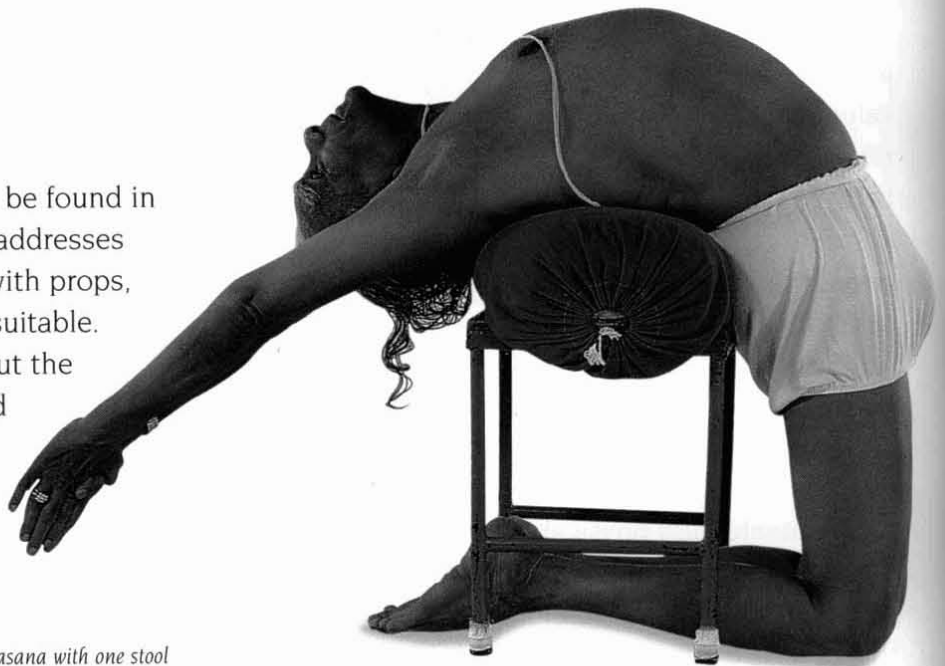
A WALL GIVES YOU ALIGNMENT

Yogacharya Iyengar adjusts the position of the student's arms in Tadasana Urdhva Hastasana



Props

The props shown on these pages can be found in your home or can be bought at the addresses listed on page 416. When you practise with props, use them in the way that you find most suitable. I have provided some basic guidelines, but the most important point is that you should feel comfortable and relaxed when practising an asana.



INVALUABLE SUPPORT
Yogacharya Iyengar in Ustrasana with one stool

The props shown below support the entire body when you practise the asana, giving you the height to co-ordinate your movements more effectively, and allowing better balance in the pose.

CHAIR

This folding metal chair has an open back rest which allows you to place your legs through it. This makes for an easier, yet still effective rotation of the torso in seated twists, such as Bharadvajasana. Holding the sides of the back rest steadies you when getting into the pose in Salamba Sarvangasana and Halasana. It provides support to the torso in back bends, such as Viparita Dandasana. Make sure that the chair is completely stable and rests firmly on the ground.



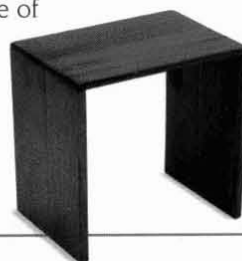
WOODEN BENCH

This bench should be broad enough to support your torso comfortably, and should be approximately 60cm (2ft) high. It must rest firmly on the ground. Cardiac patients or those with migraine or respiratory disorders will benefit from the use of this bench in their practice of Setubandha Sarvangasana.



HALF-HALASANA STOOL

This stool should be approximately 30-45cm (1-1.5ft) high to support the back and feet in Paripurna Navasana, and the back in Ustrasana. This stool helps in the practice of asanas requiring flexibility and strength in the back, abdomen, arms, and legs.



LOW, OPEN STOOL

A stool with open sides helps to support the body in back bends, such as Ustrasana, helping to lift and arch the torso easily. The stool should not be more than 45cm (1.5ft) high, and should rest firmly on the ground.



HIGH STOOL

This stool, of mid-thigh height, helps in the practice of standing twists, such as Utthita Marichyasana. The stool allows you to rotate the spine and torso effectively without strain. Make sure that the stool rests firmly on the ground and that it has a top wide enough to rest your entire foot on comfortably.



The props below support specific parts of the body and allow asanas to be held without strain and for a longer duration. Beginners, people with stiff joints or muscles, or those who have high blood pressure and need support for the head in forward bends, will find these of use.

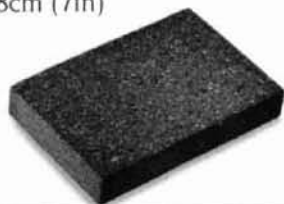
BOLSTER

Bolsters support your body while enabling you to relax and stretch effectively without strain. The bolster should weigh about 3kg (7lbs) and be stuffed with dense cotton. The bolster should be about 60cm (2ft) long, with a diameter of 23cm (9in). It should preferably have a removable cotton cover.



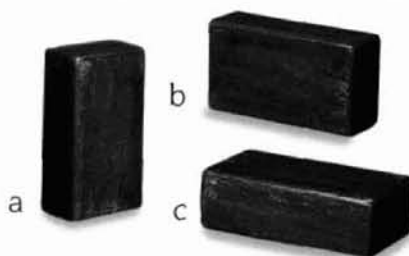
FOAM BLOCK

A foam block is placed under stacked wooden blocks to support the head in forward bends and the back in pranayama. Its dimensions are about 30cm (1ft) x 18cm (7in) x 5cm (2in).



WOODEN BLOCK

The support of wooden blocks is often used in all types of asanas. In sitting and standing asanas they support the legs, knees, or palms, and give height to seated twists. In Ujjayi Pranayama, a block supports the back and helps to open the chest. In forward bends, such as Uttanasana, blocks provide support to the head and to the hands. The measurements of the block should be about 23cm (9in) x 12cm (4.5in) x 7cm (3in). It can be placed on its short side (a); on its long side (b); and on its broad side (c); according to your requirement. While a height has been suggested for many asanas in this chapter, you should place the block at the height you find most comfortable.



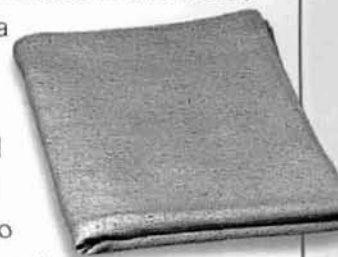
ROUNDED WOODEN BLOCK

A small block is used to give added height in the standing twist, Utthita Marichyasana. It helps you to rotate your body more effectively and without strain. It is about 5cm (2in) high and 10cm (4in) long.



FOLDED BLANKET

Folded blankets are used to support the back, to open the chest in reclining asanas and pranayama, and to support the head and shoulders in inversions, such as Salamba Sarvangasana. They provide height in seated asanas, helping to keep the torso and spine erect and also correct poor structural posture. Cotton blankets, measuring about 2m (6.5ft) x 1.2m (4ft), are most suitable. Fold one in half 3 times when using it to cushion the impact of a chair or a bench on the body. Fold in half 4 or 5 times to give added height for sitting asanas and seated twists.

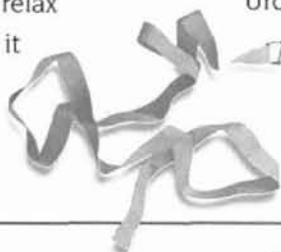


ROLLED BLANKET

This is used to support the neck in reclining asanas and back bends, and the small of the back in back bends, such as Viparita Dandasana. It helps to relieve strain on the chest and on the thighs and ankles in Virasana and Adhomukha Virasana. Fold a cotton blanket in half 4 times, and then roll it up tightly (see above).



These two props increase the effectiveness of some asanas. The belt prevents muscle or joint strain, and enhances the stretch. The bandage helps you to relax completely by making it easier to turn your thoughts inward.

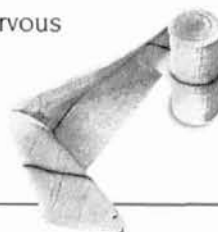


YOGA BELT

The belt helps to provide the required tension without strain in the final stretch of Supta Padangusthasana, Urdhvamukha Janu Sirsasana, and Paripurna Navasana. The belt is about 60cm (2ft) long, made of strong woven material, with a buckle at either end.

CREPE BANDAGE

The blindfold, 2.5-3m (8-10ft) long and 10cm (4in) broad, helps the eyeballs to recede into their sockets. This cools the brain, and relaxes the facial muscles and the nervous system in Savasana and pranayama.



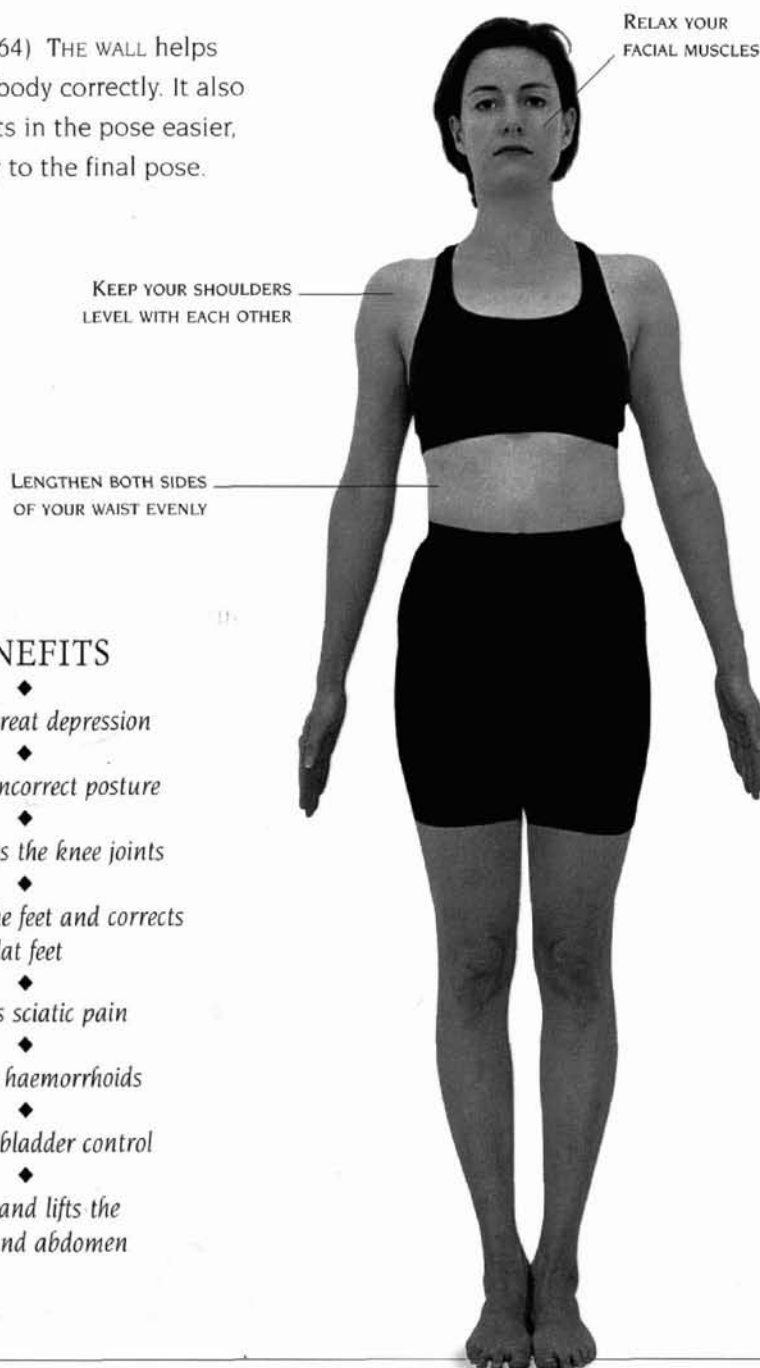
Tadasana Samasthithi

- Steady and firm mountain pose -



THIS POSE, THE starting point of all standing asanas, lifts the sternum, which is the site of the *anahata* or "heart" *chakra* (see page 37). This helps to reduce stress and boost your self-confidence, while the perfect balance of the final pose increases your alertness. In Sanskrit, *tadasana* means "mountain pose" while *samasthithi* indicates an "upright and steady state".

PROPS (See page 164) THE WALL helps you to align your body correctly. It also makes adjustments in the pose easier, and gives stability to the final pose.



BENEFITS

- ◆ Helps to treat depression
- ◆ Improves incorrect posture
- ◆ Strengthens the knee joints
- ◆ Revitalizes the feet and corrects flat feet
- ◆ Reduces sciatic pain
- ◆ Prevents haemorrhoids
- ◆ Improves bladder control
- ◆ Tones and lifts the pelvis and abdomen

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, low blood pressure, osteoarthritis of the knees, bulimia, diarrhoea, insomnia, or leukorrhoea. If you have had polio, or if you have a problem with balance, practise this asana with your feet about 25cm (10in) apart.

- 1** Stand in your bare feet on a smooth and even surface. Keep your feet together, with your heels touching the wall. Beginners may find it easier to keep their feet 5cm (2in) apart.
- 2** Stretch your arms along your sides, with the palms facing your thighs, and your fingers pointing to the floor. Stretch your neck upward, keeping the muscles soft and passive.
- 3** Distribute your weight evenly on the inner and outer edges of your feet, and on your toes and heels. Tighten your kneecaps and open the back of each knee. Turn in the front of your thighs. Tighten your buttocks. Pull in your lower abdomen, and lift your chest.
- 4** Keep your head erect and look straight ahead. Breathe evenly and with awareness. Experience your body and mind as an integrated whole and feel the surge of energy. Stay in the pose for 30-60 seconds.

Tadasana Urdhva Hastasana

- Mountain pose with arms stretched up -



THIS IS A VARIATION of the mountain pose, with the arms extended upward. *Urdhva* translates as "upward" in Sanskrit, while *hasta* means "hands". This is recommended for people in sedentary occupations, as it exercises

the arms, and the joints of the shoulders, wrists, knuckles, and fingers.

PROPS (See page 164) THE WALL helps you to align your body correctly, makes adjustments in the pose easier, and gives stability to the final pose.

KEEP THE MUSCLES
OF YOUR NECK SOFT

LIFT YOUR STERNUM
AND RIBCAGE

TIGHTEN YOUR
KNEECAPS

BENEFITS

Helps to treat depression, and boosts self-confidence

Tones and stimulates the abdomen, pelvis, torso, and back

Relieves arthritis

Reduces sciatic pain

Strengthens the knee joints

Stretches the hamstring muscles

Corrects flat feet

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, low blood pressure, osteoarthritis of the knees, bulimia, diarrhoea, insomnia, or leukorrhoea. If you have high blood pressure, do not hold the pose for more than 15 seconds. If you have a slipped disc or a prolapsed uterus, keep your feet together, and your knees apart.

1 Stand in your bare feet in Tadasana (see page 48) on an even, uncovered surface. Exhale, and stretching from your waist, lift your arms in front of you, to shoulder-level. Keep your palms open and facing each other.

2 Raise your arms above your head, perpendicular to the floor. Stretch your arms and fingers. Push your shoulder blades into your body.

3 Stretch your arms further up from your shoulders, keeping them parallel to each other. Extend your wrists, palms, and fingers toward the ceiling. Feel the stretch along both sides of your body.

4 Pull in your lower abdomen. Turn your wrists so that the palms face front. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds. Breathe evenly.

Tadasana Urdhva Baddha Hastasana

- Mountain pose with fingers interlocked -



THIS IS A VARIATION of Tadasana, the "mountain pose". Urdhva means "upward" in Sanskrit, baddha indicates "caught" or "bound", while hasta translates as "hands". In this pose, the brain is relaxed but alert, and you are aware of the intense

stretch of your whole body, from your feet to your interlocked fingers. Feel the energy flow upward from your feet to your knuckles.

PROPS (See page 164) THE WALL helps you to align your body correctly, makes adjustments in the pose easier, and gives stability to the final pose.

BENEFITS

Boosts confidence and helps to treat depression

Relieves arthritis

Stretches the shoulders, arms, wrists, and fingers

Helps to treat spinal disorders

Tones and activates the torso, back, abdomen, and pelvis

Strengthens the knee joints

Reduces sciatic pain

Corrects flat feet

LIFT YOUR STERNUM

PULL UP YOUR QUADRICEPS

EXTEND THE MOUNDS OF YOUR TOES AWAY FROM YOUR HEELS



CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have a cardiac condition, stress-related headaches, migraine, low blood pressure, insomnia, osteoarthritis of the knees, bulimia, diarrhoea, or leukorrhoea. If you have high blood pressure, do not hold the pose for more than 15 seconds.

If you have had polio, are knock-kneed, or have a problem with your balance, keep your feet 20cm (8in) apart. If you are prone to backache, have a slipped disc, or a prolapsed uterus, keep your feet together and knees apart.

1 Stand in your bare feet in Tadasana (see page 48) against a wall, on an even, uncovered surface. Bring your arms toward your chest, with your palms



facing the chest. Interlock your fingers firmly, from the base of the knuckles, with the little finger of your left hand lower than the little finger of the right hand (see inset above).

2 Turn your interlocked palms inside out (see inset below). Exhale, and stretch your arms out in front of you at shoulder-level. Then inhale, and raise your arms above your head until they



are perpendicular to the floor. Extend your arms fully and lock your elbows. Feel the stretch in your palms.

Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds.

Tadasana Paschima Baddha Namaskar

- Mountain pose with the arms folded behind the back -



THE SANSKRIT WORDS *paschima baddha namaskar* mean "hands folded at the back in the salutation of *namaskar*". *Baddha* means "bound" or "caught". This asana is an easier version of Tadasana Paschima Namaskar (see page 172), and

helps to prepare you for the regular pose, which calls for greater flexibility and extension of the back and arms.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have angina, stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, insomnia, low blood pressure, osteoarthritis of the knees, leukorrhoea, or bulimia.

If you have a slipped disc, a displaced uterus, or painful wrist joints, keep your feet together and your knees apart. If you have had polio, or have any problems with your balance, keep your feet at least 25cm (10in) apart.



1 Stand in your bare feet in Tadasana (see page 48) on an even, uncovered surface. Take your right arm behind your back, and hold your left arm just above the elbow. Bend your left arm and take it behind your back. Stretch both legs and imagine you are pulling the skin, muscles, and bones of your legs up to your waist.

BENEFITS

Boosts confidence and helps to reduce depression

Helps in the treatment of cervical spondylosis

Relieves arthritis of the shoulders, arms, wrists, and fingers

Strengthens the knee joints and reduces sciatic pain

Corrects flat feet

EXTEND YOUR
HAMSTRINGS

KEEP YOUR BACK ERECT

TIGHTEN YOUR
BUTTOCK MUSCLES

2 Hold your right arm just above the elbow with your left hand. Your grip should be firm but not tight. Keep your forearms pressed to your back. Turn in your upper arms slightly. Push your elbows back, but do not allow them to lift. Initially, hold the pose for 20-30 seconds. With practice, increase the duration to 1 minute. You should breathe evenly throughout.

REST YOUR WEIGHT
EQUALLY ON
BOTH FEET

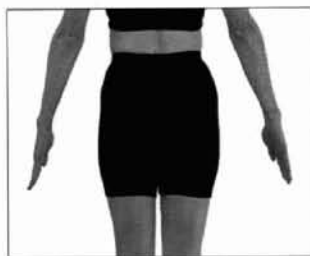
Tadasana Paschima Namaskar

- Mountain pose with hands folded behind the back -



IN THIS STANDING ASANA, the hands are folded at the back in the Indian salutation of *namaskar* or "greeting". This stretch requires considerable flexibility in the upper body and arms. Practise Tadasana Paschima Baddha Namaskar (see page 171)

until your shoulder, elbow, and wrist joints are sufficiently supple to perform this asana easily.



1 Stand in your bare feet in Tadasana (see page 48) on an even, uncovered surface. Gently turn your arms in and out a few times. Take them behind you and join your fingertips, pointing them to the floor. Rest your thumbs on your lower back. Move your elbows back and rotate your wrists, so that your fingertips turn and point first toward your back, and then upward.

BENEFITS

Reduces depression

Relieves cervical spondylosis

Increases the flexibility of the upper body, arms, elbows, and wrists

Strengthens the knee joints

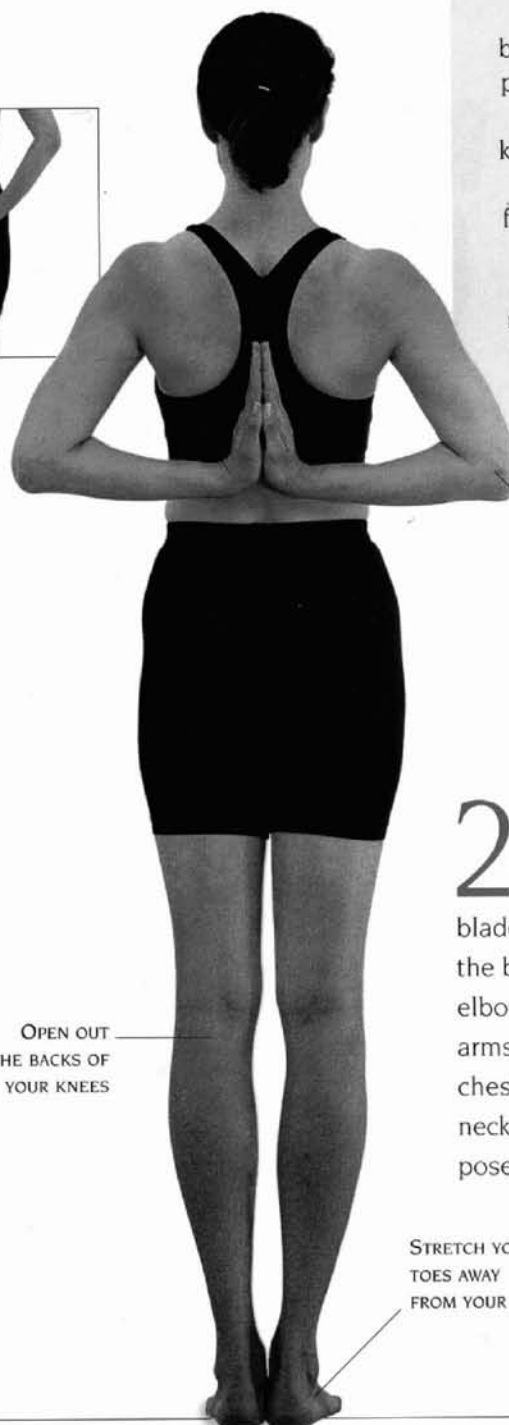
Reduces sciatic pain

Corrects flat feet

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have a cardiac condition, stress-related headaches, migraine, low blood pressure, insomnia, osteoarthritis of the knees, bulimia, diarrhoea, or leukorrhoea. If you have high blood pressure, do not hold the pose for more than 15 seconds.

If you have had polio, or are knock-kneed, or have a problem with your balance, keep your feet 20cm (8in) apart. If you are prone to backache, have a slipped disc, or a prolapsed uterus, keep your feet together and knees apart.



MOVE YOUR ELBOWS
BACK AND DOWN

OPEN OUT
THE BACKS OF
YOUR KNEES

STRETCH YOUR
TOES AWAY
FROM YOUR HEELS

2 Press your palms together, and move them up your back until they are between your shoulder blades. Keep your palms joined from the base to the fingertips. Push your elbows down, to stretch your upper arms and chest. Focus on keeping your chest and armpits open. Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds. Breathe evenly.

Tadasana Gomukhasana

- Mountain pose with hands held in the shape of a cow's face -



THE INTERLINKED HANDS in the final pose of this asana take the shape of *gomukha*, which means

"a cow's face" in Sanskrit. The asana is a variation of Tadasana, the mountain pose. It activates the muscles of the shoulders and back. The stretch in

the arms helps to relieve arthritis in the shoulders, elbows, wrists, and fingers.



DO NOT ARCH
YOUR BACK

PULL IN
YOUR TAILBONE

KEEP YOUR
LEGS STRETCHED
UPWARD

BENEFITS

- ◆ Boosts confidence and helps to treat depression
- ◆ Alleviates cervical spondylosis
- ◆ Improves breathing by opening up the chest
- ◆ Strengthens the knee joints
- ◆ Reduces sciatic pain
- ◆ Corrects flat feet

CAUTIONS

Avoid this asana if you have a cardiac condition, stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, insomnia, low blood pressure, osteoarthritis of the knees, diarrhoea, or leukorrhoea.

If you have had polio, or any congenital deformity of the legs, or are knock-kneed, keep your feet about 25cm (10in) apart.

If you have backache, a slipped disc, a displaced uterus, or pain in the wrist joints, keep your feet together and your knees slightly apart.

2 Place your right palm on your left palm and interlink the fingers of both hands. If this proves difficult, touch the fingertips of both hands to each other. Do not force your arms to bend – give yourself time to adjust to the action. Consciously relax your arms. Open your right armpit to create space between your chest and your upper right arm. Keep your right elbow pointed up and back, and your right forearm close to your head. Lower your left elbow further. Then place the back of your left wrist on your back. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Utthita Trikonasana

- Extended triangle pose -



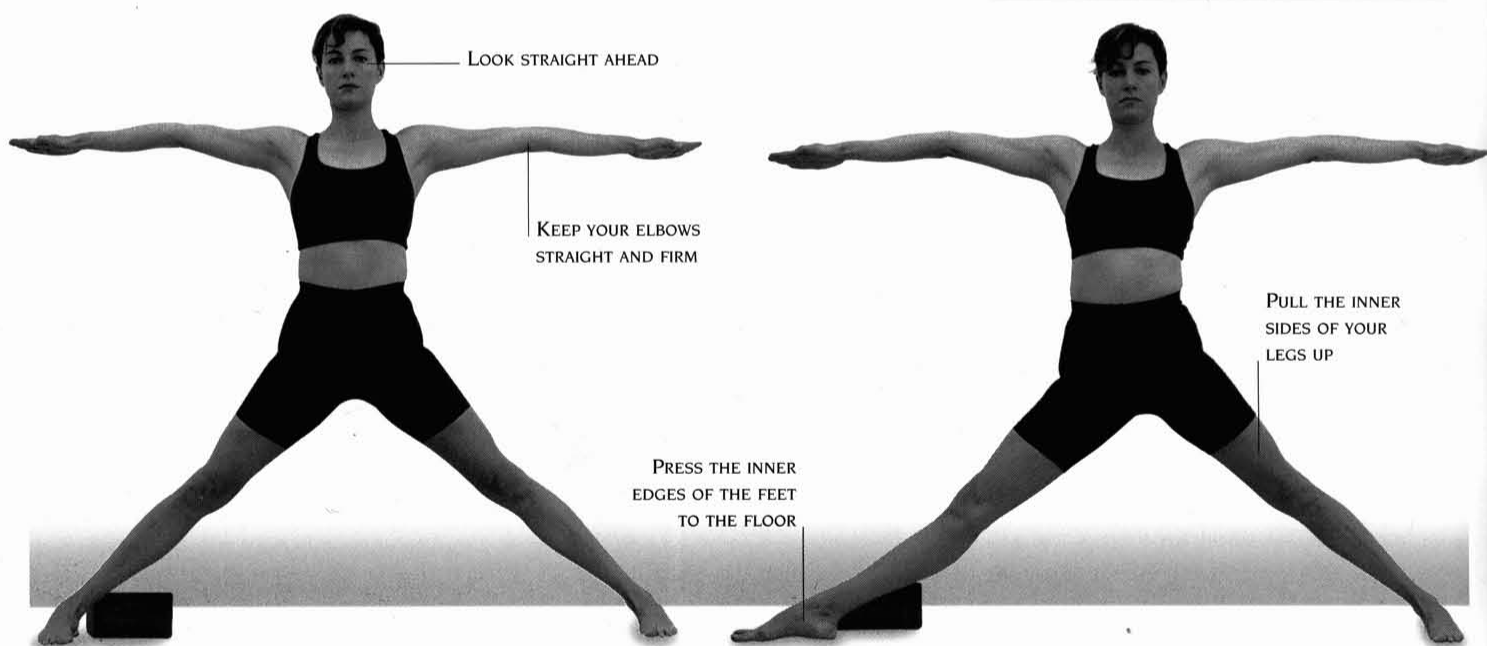
THIS ASANA IS A VARIATION of the classic pose (see page 50). Regular practice of this asana taps energy stored in the tailbone, which is an important source of vitality and strength. This helps those who require more energy to function efficiently when under stress. The pose activates the spine, keeping it supple and well-aligned. It relieves backache, and reduces stiffness in the neck, shoulders, and knees.

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL, A BLOCK, AND A MAT. Practice against a wall supports the body, reduces strain, and helps to align the body correctly. The mat prevents your feet from slipping,

helping to maintain the final balance in the pose. The block helps those with stiff backs to reach the floor, and allows for greater extension of the spine, neck, and shoulders.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, diarrhoea, low blood pressure, psoriasis, varicose veins, or if you are depressed, or extremely fatigued. Patients of rheumatoid arthritis who have fever should avoid this asana. Do not practise during menstruation. If you have high blood pressure, do not look up at the raised arm in the pose. If you have cervical spondylosis, do not look up for too long.



1 Spread a mat against a wall. Place a wooden block on its long side on the right edge of the mat. Stand in Tadasana (see page 48) on the centre of the mat. Inhale, then spread your feet about 1m (3.5ft) apart. Your heels and buttocks should touch the wall. Raise your arms out to your sides until they are in line with your shoulders.

2 Now, turn the right foot out to the right until it is parallel to the wall. Turn your left foot in slightly to the right. Your left heel and buttocks should touch the wall. Keep your left leg straight. Stretch your arms away from your body, keeping them parallel to the floor, with your palms facing down.

BENEFITS

- ◆ Tones the abdominal organs
- ◆ Stimulates digestion, relieving gastritis, acidity, and flatulence
- ◆ Tones the pelvic organs, correcting the effects of a sedentary lifestyle or faulty posture
- ◆ Alleviates backache
- ◆ Reduces stiffness in the neck, shoulders, and knees
- ◆ Tones the ligaments of the arms and legs
- ◆ Helps to relieve menstrual disorders

THE GURU'S ADVICE

"You must keep your arms fully stretched out in this asana. Look at how I am straightening and extending the student's arm, wrist, and fingers."



DO NOT TILT
YOUR HEAD

OPEN YOUR ARMPITS

PUSH YOUR RIGHT
SHOULDER INTO
YOUR BODY

EXTEND AND
RELAX THE TIPS
OF YOUR TOES

LIFT YOUR KNEECAPS
BY CONTRACTING YOUR
QUADRICEP MUSCLES

3 Bend to the right and extend your right arm toward the floor. Place your right palm on the block. Pull the tailbone into your body, keeping your left buttock and shoulders firmly pressed to the wall. Raise the left arm up toward the ceiling. Turn your head and look at your left thumb. Rest your weight on both heels, and not on your right palm. Breathe evenly, not deeply. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Utthita Parsvakonasana

- Intense side stretch -



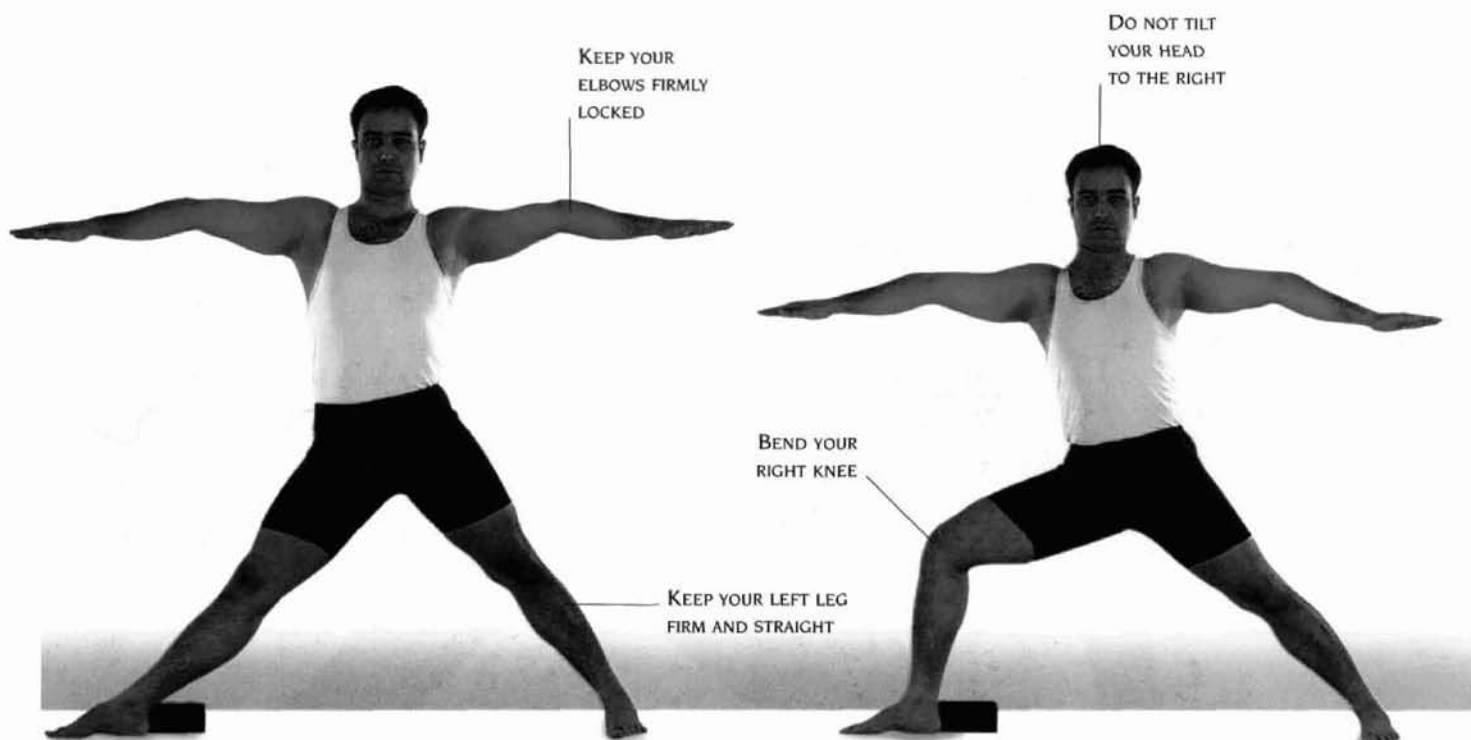
THIS ASANA IS A VARIATION of the classic pose (see page 60) and is practised against a wall, with a block under the lowered hand. There is often a tendency to sink down on the bent leg in the final pose of this asana. Using the recommended props guards against this, and gives greater freedom for adjustments in the pose, without strain or injury.

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL AND A WOODEN BLOCK. The support of the wall reduces fatigue, helps you to hold the pose longer, and aligns your neck and head correctly. A wooden block is placed

at a suitable height under the lowered hand. This helps those who have a stiff spine or who find it difficult to reach the floor. It also helps to maintain steadiness in the pose.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have stress-related headaches, migraine, osteoarthritis of the knees, rheumatic fever, varicose veins, low blood pressure, chronic fatigue syndrome, diarrhoea, psoriasis, insomnia, depression, or bulimia. Avoid the pose during menstruation, or if you have irregular or heavy periods, premenstrual stress, or leukorrhoea. If you have cervical spondylosis, look up briefly in the final pose. Those with hypertension should look at the floor.

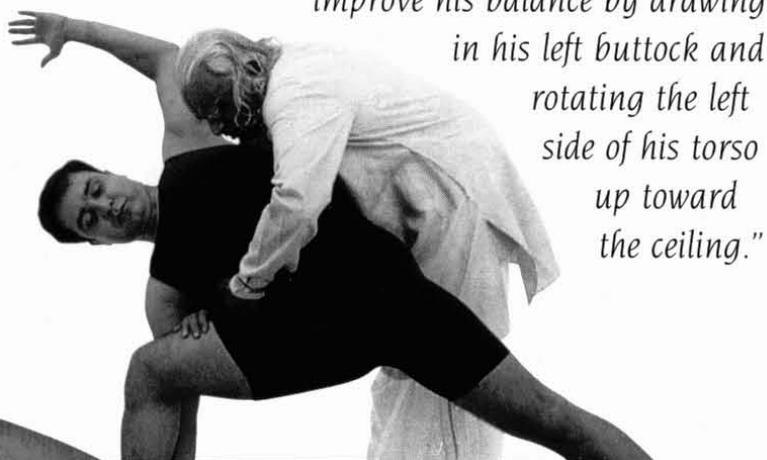


1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48) against a wall, with your heels and your buttocks touching it. Place the block on the floor behind your right foot. Inhale, and spread your feet 1m (3.5ft) apart. Turn your right foot out to the right, until it is parallel to the wall.

2 Turn your left foot in slightly to the right. Press the outer edge of your left foot firmly on the floor, and bend the right knee, pushing your thigh down until your calf is at right angles to the floor. Stretch your left arm away from your left shoulder.

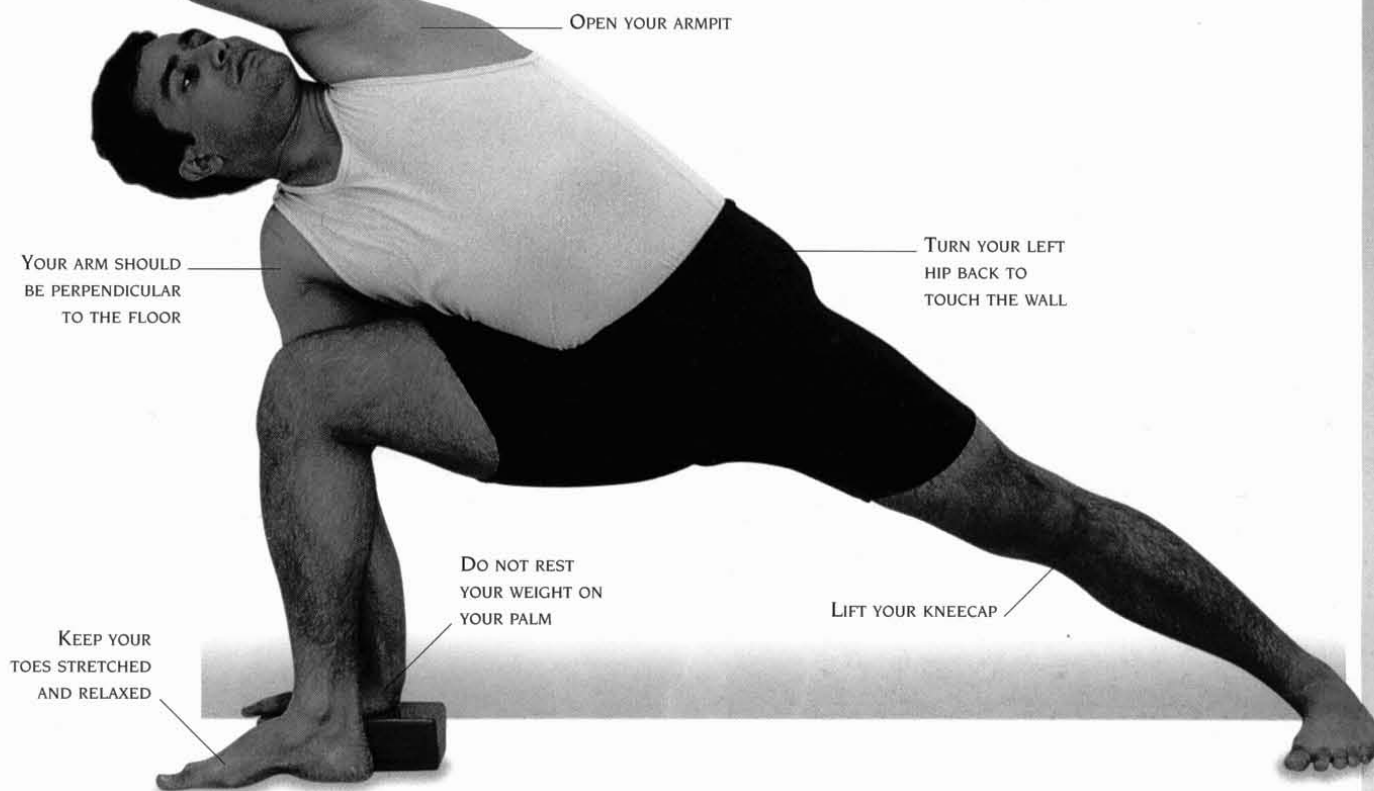
THE GURU'S ADVICE

"Look at how I am supporting the student's right side, in the region of his floating ribs. This support helps him to improve his balance by drawing in his left buttock and rotating the left side of his torso up toward the ceiling."



BENEFITS

- ◆ Corrects misalignment of the shoulders and shoulder blades
- ◆ Relieves backache and neck sprains
- ◆ Makes the hip joint and spinal column supple
- ◆ Strengthens the legs and knees, particularly the hamstring muscles
- ◆ Stretches and tones the abdominal and pelvic organs
- ◆ Stimulates digestion by relieving gastritis, acidity, and flatulence
- ◆ Helps relieve menstrual disorders



3 Bend to the right, and place your right palm on the block. Stretch the left arm up, with the palm facing forward. Now rotate the arm and bring it toward your left ear. Your left thumb should touch the wall. Turn your head and look at your left arm. Maintain

a continuous stretch from the left ankle to the left wrist. Press your outer left foot into the floor. Move your shoulder blades into your body, and extend your spine toward your head. Hold the pose for 30 seconds. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Ardha Chandrasana

- Half moon pose -



IN SANSKRIT, *ardha* means “half”, while *chandra* translates as “moon”. In this asana, your body takes the shape of a half moon. Regular practice enhances your span of concentration. It also improves co-ordination and motor reflexes. The intense stretch it gives to the spine, strengthens the paraspinal muscles, keeping the spine supple and well-aligned.

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL AND A WOODEN BLOCK. The wall gives stability and helps to align the head and neck.

The wooden block makes the pose easier for those who have stiff backs and cannot reach the floor.

1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48). Place a block on its short side against the wall. Inhale, spread your feet 1m (3.5ft) apart. Raise your arms to shoulder-level.

2 Turn your right foot out to the right, parallel to the wall, and turn your left foot in, slightly to the right. Bend your right knee, and place the right palm on the block. Raise your left arm.

BENEFITS

Rotates and flexes the vertebral joints, keeping the spinal muscles supple

Tones the lumbar and sacral spine, relieving backache

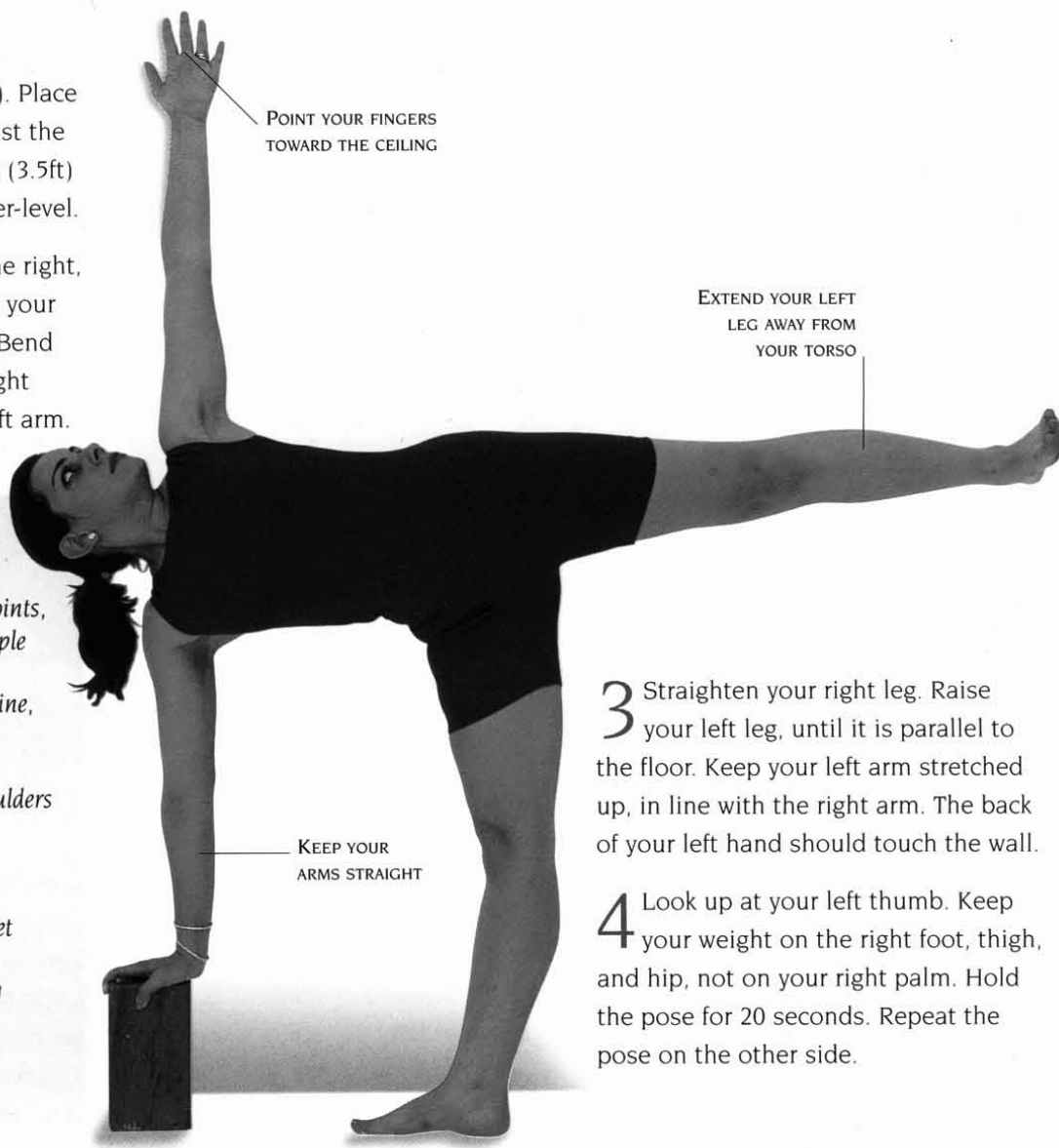
Corrects misalignment of the shoulders

Helps relieve sciatica

Improves circulation in the feet

Relieves gastritis and acidity

Corrects a prolapsed uterus



POINT YOUR FINGERS TOWARD THE CEILING

EXTEND YOUR LEFT LEG AWAY FROM YOUR TORSO

KEEP YOUR ARMS STRAIGHT

3 Straighten your right leg. Raise your left leg, until it is parallel to the floor. Keep your left arm stretched up, in line with the right arm. The back of your left hand should touch the wall.

4 Look up at your left thumb. Keep your weight on the right foot, thigh, and hip, not on your right palm. Hold the pose for 20 seconds. Repeat the pose on the other side.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, varicose veins, diarrhoea, insomnia, or chronic fatigue syndrome. Avoid this pose if you are tired. If you have hypertension, do not look up at your raised arm. Look straight ahead.

Uttanasana

- Intense forward stretch -



THIS IS A LESS STRENUOUS version of the classic pose (see page 72) that helps beginners and those with stiff backs to achieve the final forward stretch. There are five variations of the final pose.

Practise the one you find most comfortable, and

which suits your needs the best. This is both a calming and recuperative asana, which rests and energizes the heart and lungs.

PROPS (See page 164) A FOAM BLOCK AND FIVE WOODEN BLOCKS. Stack three wooden blocks on top of the foam block. Place a wooden block on either side of the stacked blocks.

SPECIFIC CAUTION Until your back muscles become more flexible, use props to support your head.

SPECIFIC BENEFIT Soothes and calms the body and brain.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have osteoarthritis of the knees, or diarrhoea. Patients of rheumatoid arthritis who have fever should avoid this asana.

Avoid the pose if you have excessive curvature of the lumbar spine or scoliosis. If you have low blood pressure, come out of the pose gradually to avoid dizziness.

DO NOT ALLOW YOUR BUTTOCKS TO JUT BACK

KEEP YOUR SHOULDER BLADES LOWERED

EXTERNALLY ROTATE THE SKIN OF THE FOREARMS

PRESS YOUR HANDS DOWN ON THE BLOCKS



1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48).

Separate your legs to a distance of 30cm (1ft). Keep your feet parallel to each other, with the toes pointing forward. Pull up your kneecaps.

2 Inhale and raise your arms toward the ceiling, your palms facing forward. Push your spine up.

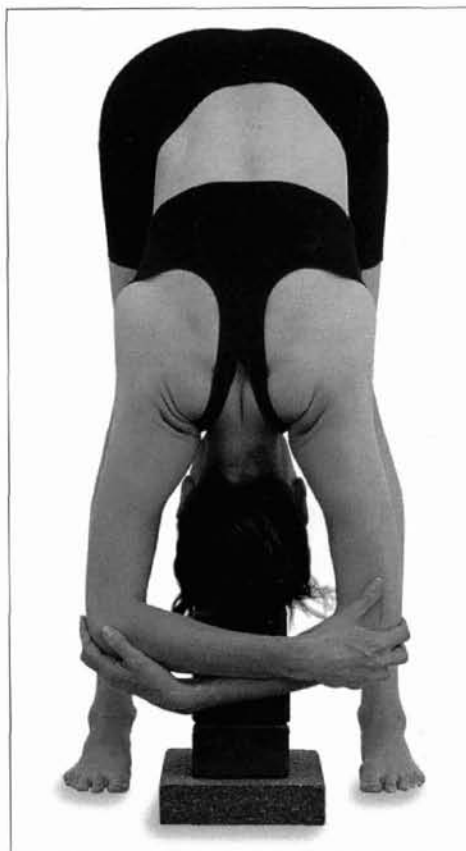
3 Bend from the waist toward the floor. To increase the stretch of your spine, vital for correct practice, press your heels down on the floor.

4 Rest the crown of your head on the blocks in front of you, and place your palms on the blocks beside your feet. Pull in your kneecaps. Extend your hamstrings and pull your inner legs upward. Feel one single stretch from the crown of your head to your heels. Hold the pose for 1 minute.

"The regular, persevering, and alert practice of yoga is the foundation for stabilizing the consciousness."

BENEFITS

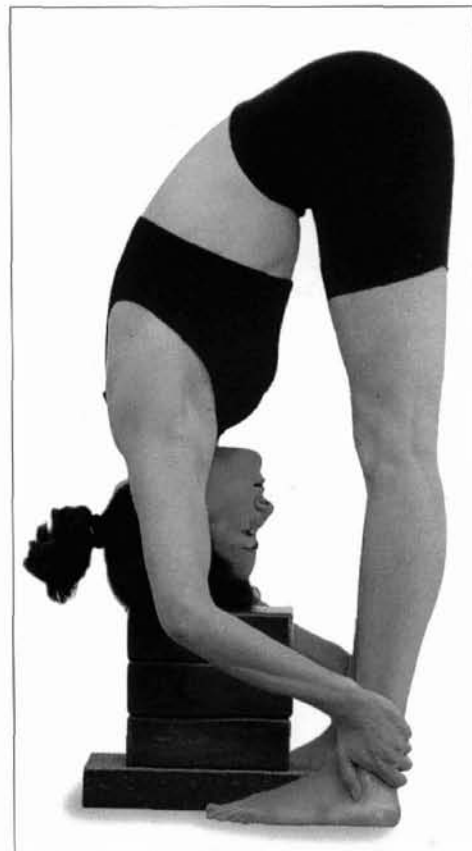
- ◆
Reduces depression
if practised regularly
- ◆
Cures insomnia and relieves fatigue
- ◆
Increases blood flow to the brain,
soothing the brain cells
and sympathetic nervous system
- ◆
Regulates blood pressure
- ◆
Relieves migraine and
stress-related headaches
- ◆
Tones the abdominal organs
- ◆
Relieves stomachache by
neutralizing acidity
- ◆
Strengthens and stretches the
hamstring muscles
- ◆
Increases the flexibility of the hip joint
- ◆
Strengthens the knee joint and its
surrounding tissue and muscles



VARIATION 1 Hands on Elbows

PROPS (See page 164) A FOAM BLOCK AND THREE WOODEN BLOCKS. This variation is easier for beginners and for those who are too stiff to place their palms on the floor or on blocks.

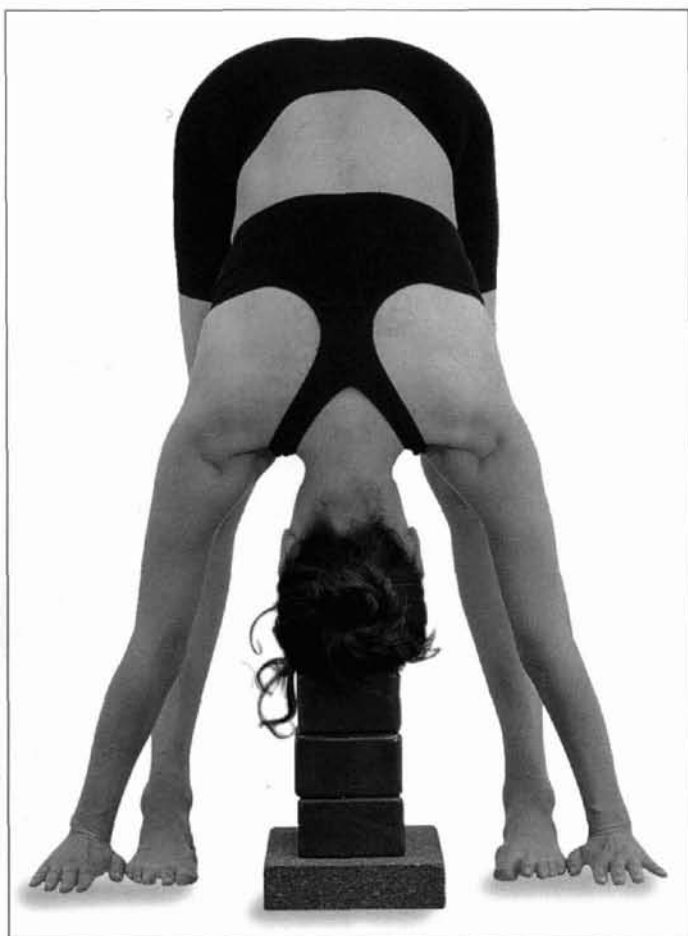
GETTING INTO THE POSE Place the foam block on the floor and stack the 3 wooden blocks on it. Follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana. Bend your right arm. Clasp your left elbow with your right hand. Hold the right elbow with your left hand. Place the crown of your head on the stacked blocks. Hold the pose for 1 minute.



VARIATION 2 Hands on Ankles

PROPS (See page 164) A FOAM BLOCK AND THREE WOODEN BLOCKS. The blocks support the head and make the forward bend easier.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place the foam block on the floor and stack the 3 wooden blocks on it. Then follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana. Exhale, and place the crown of your head on the blocks placed in front of you. Hold your right ankle with your right hand. Simultaneously, hold the left ankle with your left hand. Breathe evenly, and stay in the pose for 1 minute.



VARIATION 3 Palms on Floor

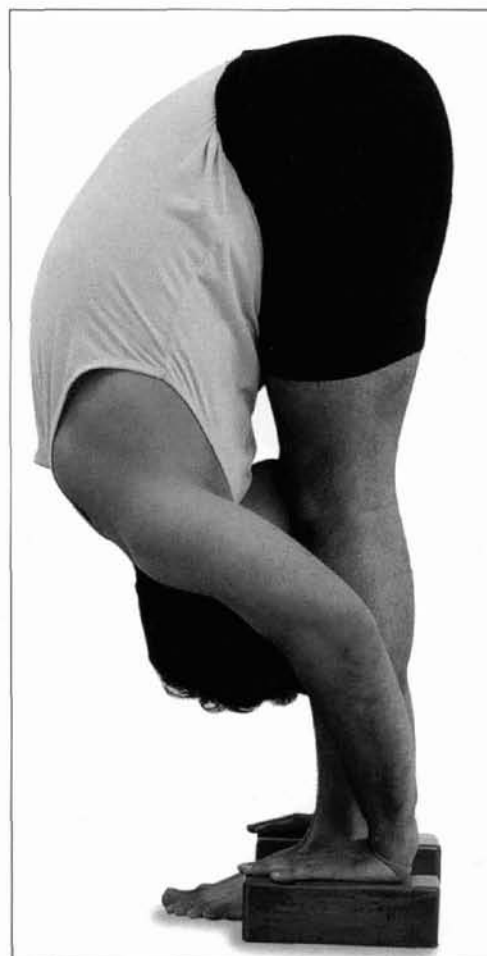
PROPS (See page 164) A FOAM BLOCK AND THREE WOODEN BLOCKS. Once the muscles of your back feel flexible enough, do not use blocks to support your hands. Instead, place your palms flat on the floor in the final pose.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place the blocks, as given for Variation 2 on page 180. Then follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana. Ensure that both your heels are pressed to the floor, and stretch the hamstring muscles at the



back of your thighs. Then, place your palms flat on the floor, just beyond

your feet (see inset). The thumb of each hand should touch the little toe of each foot. Distribute your body weight equally on the toes and heels of both your feet. Breathe evenly, and hold the pose for 1 minute.



VARIATION 4 Palms on Blocks

PROPS (See page 164) TWO WOODEN BLOCKS. Practise this variation only when you feel your back muscles are sufficiently flexible to hold the forward bend, without the support of blocks for your head.

SPECIFIC CAUTIONS This variation is not recommended for beginners. Do not practise this pose if you are prone to hypertension, headaches, cervical spondylosis, insomnia, migraine, or prolapsed discs.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Stand with your feet together. Place a block on its broad side on either side of your feet, with the long edges of the blocks parallel to your feet. Follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana. When you bend from the waist, place your palms on the blocks. Press your chin to your knees. Hold the pose for 1 minute.

Prasarita Padottanasana

- Intense leg stretch -



IN SANSKRIT, *prasarita* means "stretched out" or "spread out", while *pada* means "leg" or "foot".

This asana gives an intense stretch to your legs. The torso is inverted in the pose, and the head rests on the floor, or on a block or a bolster. This restful and recuperative asana is usually practised toward the end of the standing pose cycle, just before Salamba Sirsasana (see page 118). Practising the asana cools the body and brain, and gives you a feeling of tranquillity and repose.

CAUTIONS

Do not hold this asana for more than 1 minute, especially if you are a beginner. If you have low blood pressure, come out of the pose gradually, to avoid dizziness. Do not tilt your head or compress your neck while practising this pose.

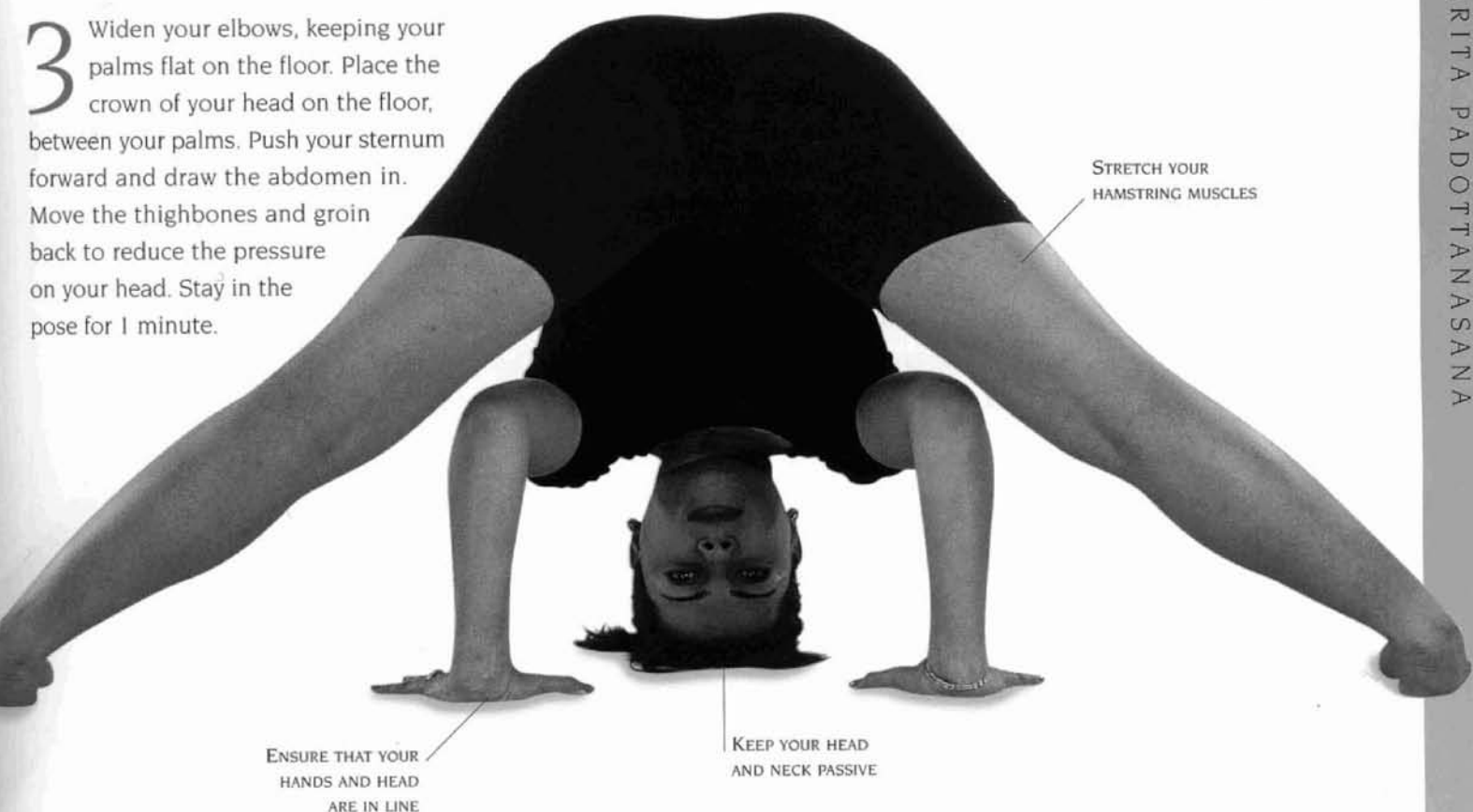


1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48). Place your hands on your hips, with your thumbs on your back and your fingers on the front of the hips. Inhale, and spread your feet 1.2m (4ft) apart. Your feet should be parallel to each other, the toes pointing forward. Press the outer edges of your feet to the floor. Keep your back erect.



2 Exhale, and lift both kneecaps. Bend forward, extending your spine, and bring your torso down toward the floor. Look up as you bend to ensure that your back is concave. Take both hands off your hips, and lower them to the floor. Place your palms flat on the floor with your fingers spread out.

3 Widen your elbows, keeping your palms flat on the floor. Place the crown of your head on the floor, between your palms. Push your sternum forward and draw the abdomen in. Move the thighbones and groin back to reduce the pressure on your head. Stay in the pose for 1 minute.



BENEFITS

Reduces depression, boosts confidence

Soothes the brain and the sympathetic nervous system

Energizes the heart and lungs

Reduces blood pressure

Relieves stress-related headaches, migraine, and fatigue

Tones the abdominal organs

Relieves stomachache by neutralizing acidity

Relieves lower backache

Strengthens the knee joint and makes the hip joint supple

Regulates menstrual flow



VARIATION 1 Head on Bolster

PROPS (See page 164) A BOLSTER helps those with stiff lower backs to achieve the final pose more effectively and without strain.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place a bolster on the floor, with its flat end between your feet. Follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana. When you bend toward the floor, place your crown on the centre of the bolster. Keep your head and neck relaxed. Now, shift your weight onto your heels. Hold the pose for 1 minute.



VARIATION 2 Head on Block

PROPS (See page 164) A WOODEN BLOCK will help you if you have a stiff spine and find it difficult to place your head on the floor. Use the block until your spine and the muscles of your back become more flexible.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place a wooden block on its broad side, on the floor in front of your feet. Then follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana and bend forward. Place the crown of your head on the centre of the block. Hold the pose for 1 minute.

Adhomukha Svanasana

- Downward-facing dog stretch -



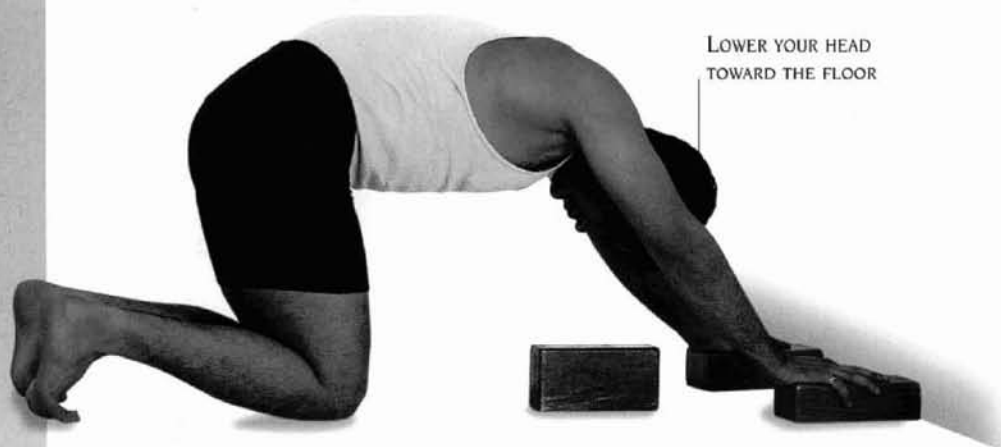
THIS INVERTED STRETCH brings fresh blood to the heart as well as the lungs, increasing the fitness of the entire body. *Adhomukha* means "facing down" in Sanskrit, while *svan* translates as "dog". This pose and its variations are less strenuous versions of the classic pose (see page 68), allowing a better stretch of the limbs, and calming and soothing the mind.

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL AND THREE WOODEN BLOCKS. Two blocks against the wall support the hands, stretch the arms, and reduce strain on the shoulder joints. The third block helps those with stiff backs to achieve the final pose.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Helps increase self-confidence. Relieves headaches and hypertension. Helps to rest and rejuvenate the heart. Reduces the "heavy-headed" feeling associated with menopause.

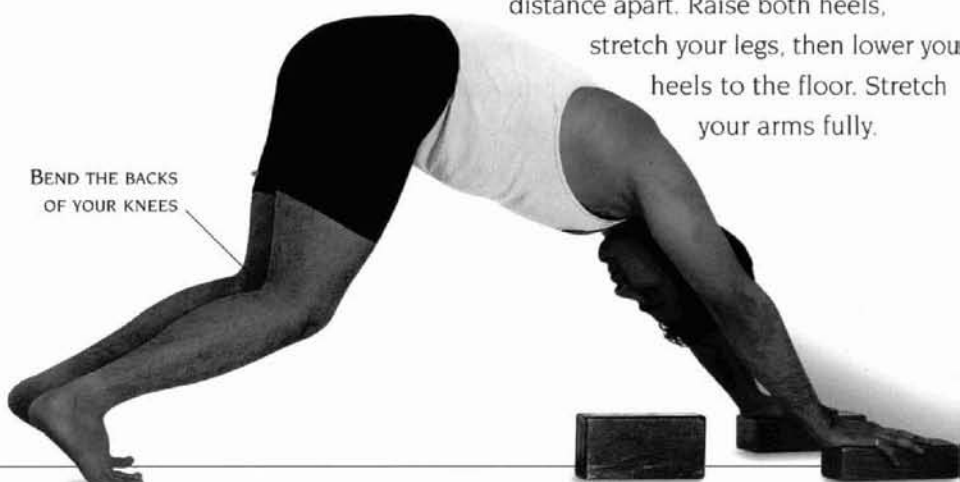
CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have diarrhoea or varicose veins. Patients of rheumatoid arthritis who have fever should avoid this asana. If you have a stiff spine or high blood pressure, or are prone to recurrent headaches, always practise all these variations with your head supported by a block. Beginners should not hold the final pose for more than 30 seconds. Gradually increase the duration to 1 minute.

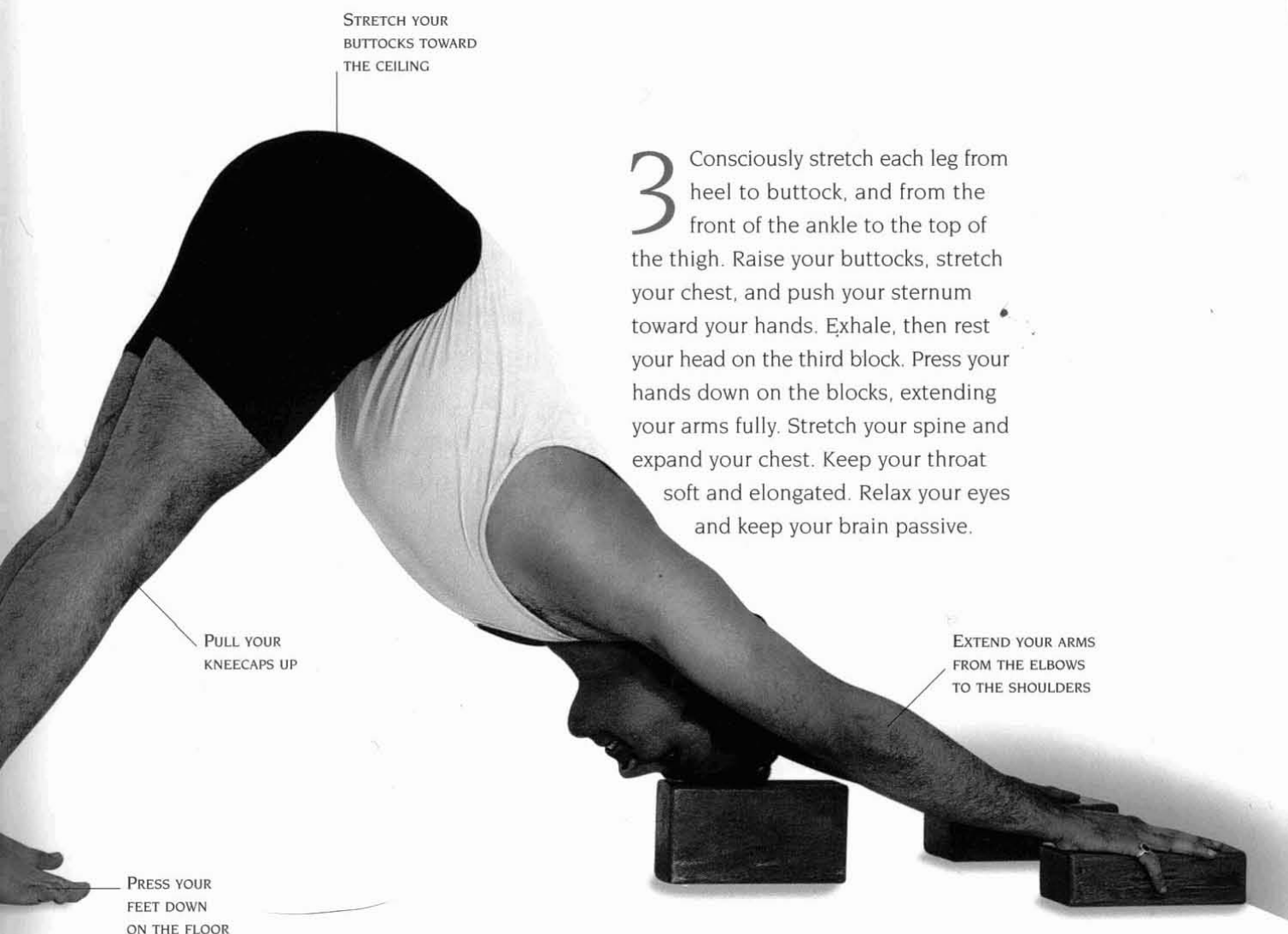


1 Stand in Tadasana (see page 48) facing a wall, about 1m (3.5ft) away from it. Place 2 of the blocks on their broad sides, shoulder-width apart, against the wall. Place the third block on its long side, 45cm (18in) away from the wall. Separate your feet to a distance of 45cm (18in). Kneel, and place your palms on the two blocks against the wall.

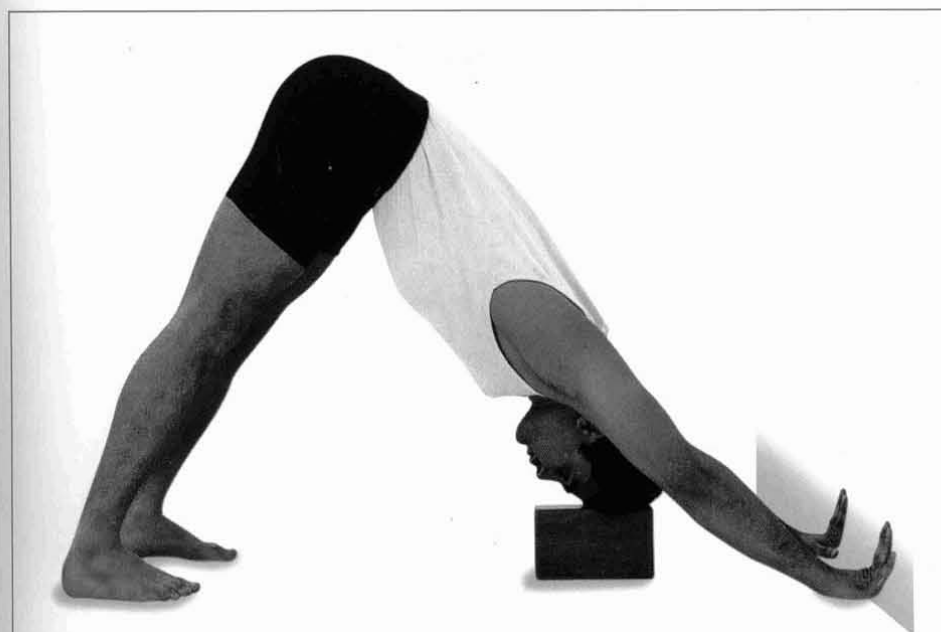
PUSH YOUR HEELS BACK AND PULL YOUR INNER ANKLES UP



2 Press your palms down on the blocks and walk your feet back until they are 1.2m (4ft) away from your hands. Make sure that your feet are in line with your hands and the same distance apart. Raise both heels, stretch your legs, then lower your heels to the floor. Stretch your arms fully.



3 Consciously stretch each leg from heel to buttock, and from the front of the ankle to the top of the thigh. Raise your buttocks, stretch your chest, and push your sternum toward your hands. Exhale, then rest your head on the third block. Press your hands down on the blocks, extending your arms fully. Stretch your spine and expand your chest. Keep your throat soft and elongated. Relax your eyes and keep your brain passive.



VARIATION 1 Hands against a Wall

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL AND A WOODEN BLOCK. Placing the fingers against the wall supports the shoulders, reducing strain in the shoulder joints.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Helps to relieve arthritis of the shoulders, elbows, wrists, and fingers.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Follow Steps 1 and 2 of the main asana, omitting the blocks for the hands. Place your fingers on the wall, ensuring that both palms rest firmly on the floor. Then follow Step 3 of the main asana.

BENEFITS

◆
Tones and relaxes the nervous system, helping to relieve depression and anxiety

◆
Cures breathlessness, palpitation, extreme fatigue, and sunstroke

◆
Stabilizes blood pressure and heart rate

◆
Helps relieve chronic constipation, indigestion, and excess bile formation

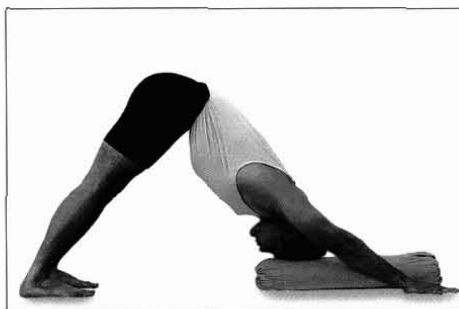
◆
Relieves arthritis in the shoulders, wrists, and fingers

◆
Reduces lower backache

◆
Increases the flexibility of the hip, knee, and ankle joints, and strengthens the ligaments and tendons of the legs

◆
Counters the damage to the cartilage of the knee or hamstring muscles, caused by jogging, walking, and other sports

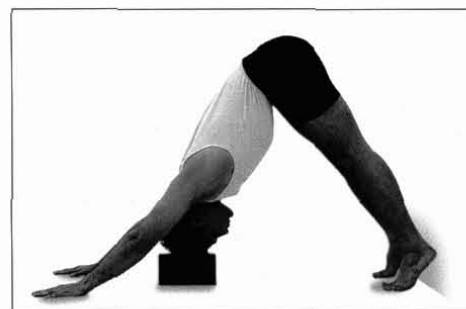
◆
Strengthens the arches of the feet and prevents calcaneal spurs



VARIATION 2
Head on Bolster

PROPS (See page 164) A BOLSTER AND A MAT. The bolster supports the head, helping those with stiff backs to achieve the forward bend easily and without strain. The mat prevents you from slipping when you stretch out.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place a mat on the floor. Place a bolster on the mat, its long sides parallel to the long sides of the mat. Follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana and place your head on the near end of the bolster. In this variation, you should place your palms directly on the floor, omitting the blocks as support for the hands.



VARIATION 3
Heels against a Wall

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL AND A WOODEN BLOCK. Placing the heels against the wall reduces strain in the knee and hip joints.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Strengthens the calf muscles, Achilles tendons, and the arches of the feet. Reduces cramps in the calf muscles. Stretches the back.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Stand in Tadasana with your back 1.2m (4ft) away from the wall. Kneel, then place your hands on the floor. Walk your feet back and place your heels against the wall. Lock your elbows, then follow Step 3 of the main asana.

“The ethical discipline of the asana comes when you extend your body correctly, evenly, and to the maximum.”

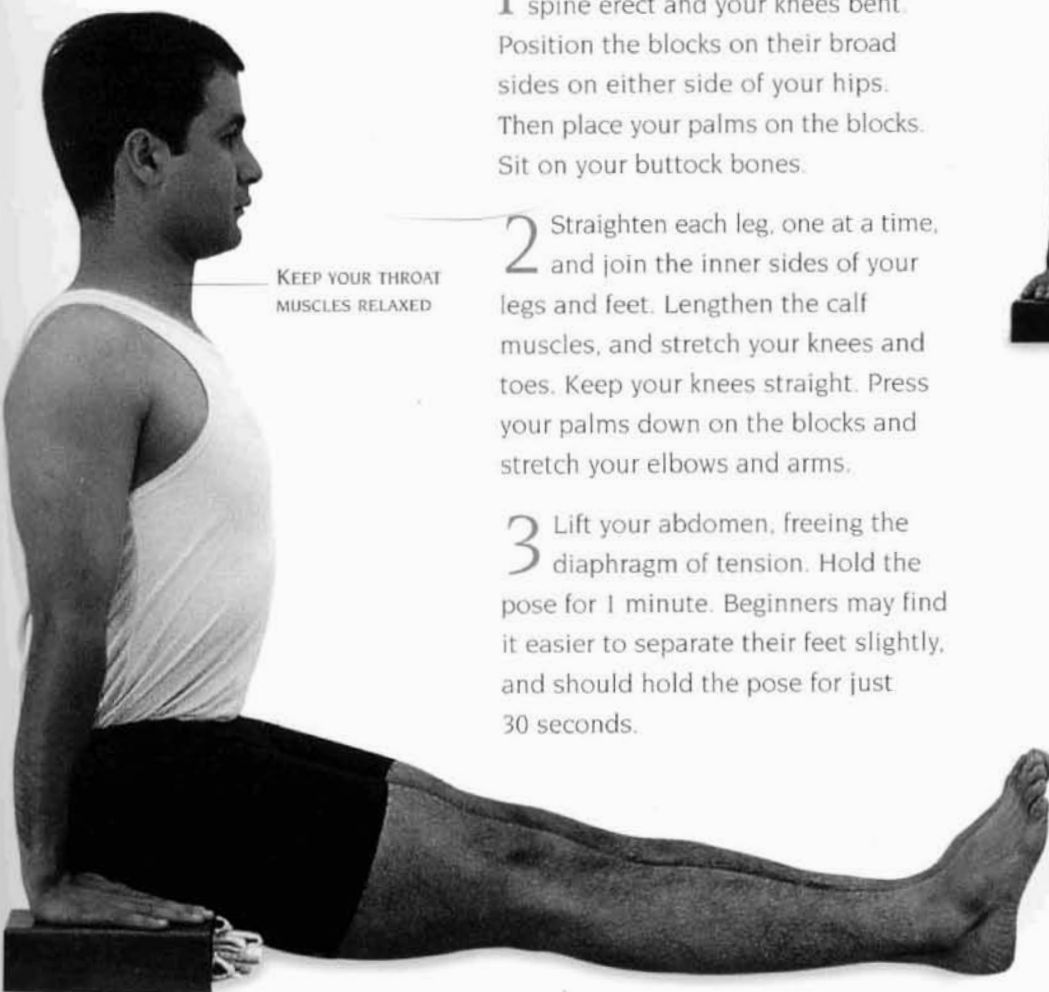
Dandasana

- Staff pose -



THIS ASANA is the starting point of all the seated forward bends and twists. It has many positive effects, the most important being improvement of posture. Dandasana teaches you to sit straight with an absolutely erect spine, and is helpful to those in sedentary professions. Regular practice of this pose massages and stimulates the abdominal and pelvic organs.

PROPS (See page 164) A MAT, TWO WOODEN BLOCKS, AND A FOLDED BLANKET. The folded blanket placed under the buttocks helps to stretch the legs, while the two blocks under the hands, help to extend the torso.



1 Sit on a folded blanket, with your spine erect and your knees bent. Position the blocks on their broad sides on either side of your hips. Then place your palms on the blocks. Sit on your buttock bones.

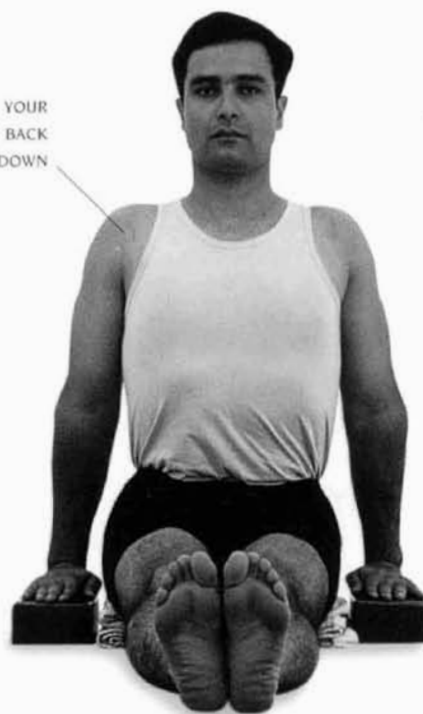
2 Straighten each leg, one at a time, and join the inner sides of your legs and feet. Lengthen the calf muscles, and stretch your knees and toes. Keep your knees straight. Press your palms down on the blocks and stretch your elbows and arms.

3 Lift your abdomen, freeing the diaphragm of tension. Hold the pose for 1 minute. Beginners may find it easier to separate their feet slightly, and should hold the pose for just 30 seconds.

CAUTIONS

If you have asthma, bronchitis, breathlessness, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcers, or bulimia, or are experiencing premenstrual stress, practise the asana with your back supported by a wall. Practise against a wall during menstruation.

ROLL YOUR
SHOULDERS BACK
AND DOWN



BENEFITS

- ◆ Improves digestion
- ◆ Tones the kidneys
- ◆ Helps to prevent sciatic pain
- ◆ Stretches and activates the muscles of the legs
- ◆ Prevents tiredness in the feet by stretching the muscles of the feet

Virasana

- Hero pose -



THESE VERSIONS OF THE classic asana, Virasana (see page 84), using rolled or folded blankets, and a block or bolsters, are designed to make the pose easier for those with stiffness in the hip, knee, or ankle joints. In addition, the extension of the spine enhances the functioning of the heart, and helps improve blood circulation to all parts of the body.

PROPS (See page 164) TWO BOLSTERS AND TWO BLANKETS. The bolsters support the legs and give the torso an upward extension. The blankets – one folded to sit on, the other rolled and placed between the calves and thighs – relieve pressure on the knees and ankles, and distribute body weight evenly.

BENEFITS

Reduces stiffness in the hip joints

Reduces inflammation in the blood vessels of the legs caused by standing for long periods

Alleviates pain or inflammation in the knees and tones knee cartilage

Relieves gout and rheumatic pain

Tones the hamstring muscles

Strengthens the arches of the feet, and relieves pain in the calves, ankles, and heels

Helps to correct calcaneal spurs and flat feet

STRETCH YOUR
SPINE UPWARD



CAUTIONS

If you experience cramps in the legs while practising this asana, stretch your legs out in Dandasana (see page 82). Avoid practising this asana if you have a headache, migraine, or diarrhoea.

1 Place 2 bolsters parallel to each other on the floor. Kneel on the bolsters, keeping your knees together. Place the rolled blanket on your shins, and the folded blanket under your buttocks. Sit with your back upright.

2 Keep your chest stretched out. Imagine you are squeezing your kidneys and drawing them into the body. Place your palms on your knees. Look straight ahead. Stay in the pose for 30-60 seconds.



VARIATION 1 Sitting on a Block

PROPS (See page 164) A BLANKET AND A BLOCK. The blanket eases strain on the knees. The block supports the buttocks.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Kneel on the floor. Separate your feet and place the block between them. Sit on the block. As you become more supple, replace the block with a folded blanket. Position the rolled blanket in front of the block and place it under both your ankles. Your feet should point back and your toes should rest on the floor. Stretch the soles of your feet. Follow Step 2 of the main asana. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds.

Urdhvamukha Janu Sirsasana

- Upward-facing bent knee pose -

THIS ASANA IS A creative adaptation of the classic pose (see page 94). In this version, the back is erect and the head is tilted back. In Sanskrit, the word *urdhvamukha* means "looking up". In this pose, the action of the eyes looking up, synchronized with the upward movement of the head, stimulates the pineal and pituitary glands. This movement also helps to refresh the mind.

CAUTIONS

Avoid this asana if you are tired, have low blood pressure, blocked arteries, stress-related headaches, migraine, eye strain, insomnia, or diarrhoea. If you have osteoarthritis of the knees, place a block under your bent knee.



PROPS (See page 164) A MAT, A BLANKET, AND A YOGA BELT. The blanket supports the buttocks. The belt helps those who

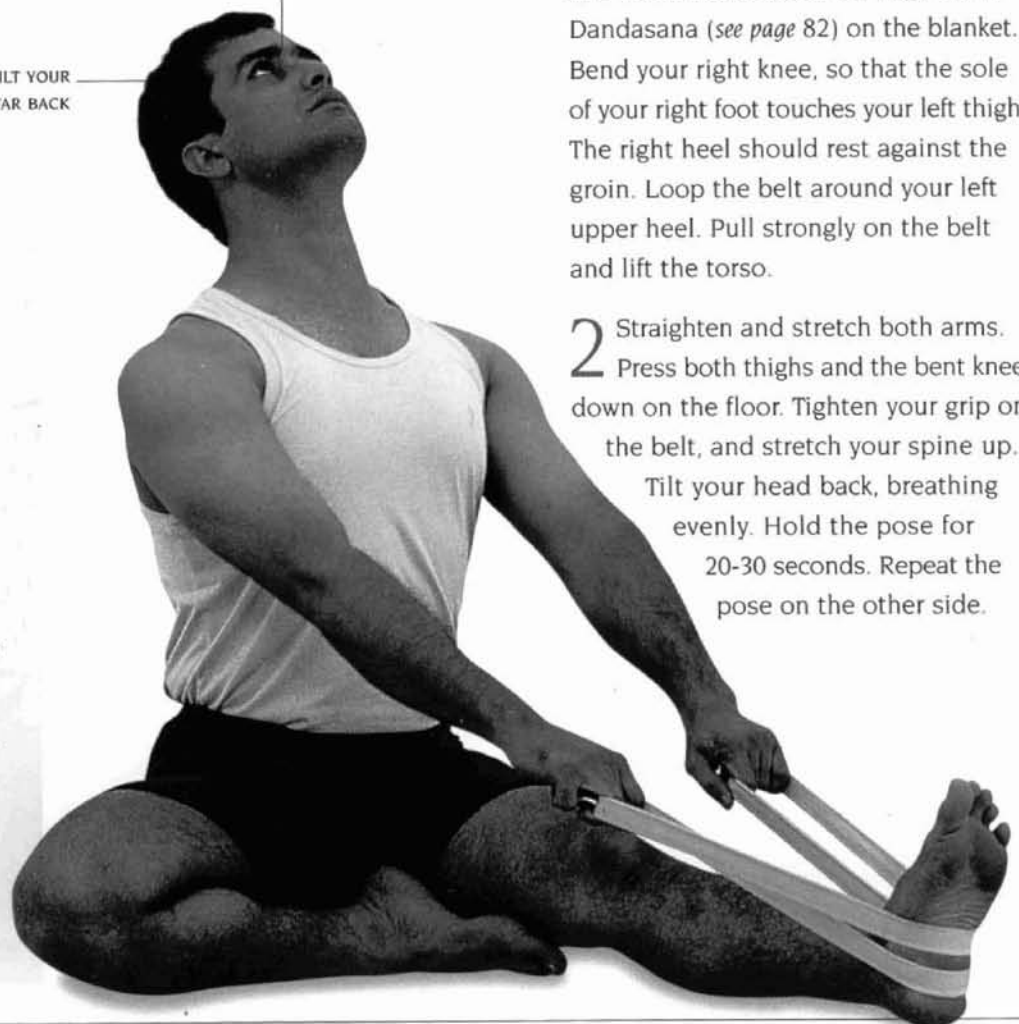
are overweight, or have stiff backs and find it hard to reach their feet. It also intensifies the stretch.

DO NOT TILT YOUR
HEAD TOO FAR BACK

RELAX THE EYES
AND FACIAL MUSCLES

BENEFITS

- ◆ Relieves lower and middle backache
- ◆ Reduces stiffness in the neck
- ◆ Tones the kidneys and the abdominal organs
- ◆ Relieves haemorrhoids
- ◆ Massages the reproductive and pelvic organs, improving their functioning
- ◆ Prevents prostate gland enlargement
- ◆ Regulates menstrual flow and relieves menstrual disorders
- ◆ Corrects a prolapsed uterus



1 Spread a mat on the floor and place a folded blanket on it. Then sit in Dandasana (see page 82) on the blanket. Bend your right knee, so that the sole of your right foot touches your left thigh. The right heel should rest against the groin. Loop the belt around your left upper heel. Pull strongly on the belt and lift the torso.

2 Straighten and stretch both arms. Press both thighs and the bent knee down on the floor. Tighten your grip on the belt, and stretch your spine up. Tilt your head back, breathing evenly. Hold the pose for 20-30 seconds. Repeat the pose on the other side.

Baddhakonasana

- Fixed angle pose -



IN THIS SITTING ASANA, the knees are bent and the feet are joined to form a fixed angle. *Baddha* means "fixed" or "bound" in Sanskrit, and *kona* translates into "angle". The use of the props makes this version easier and more comfortable than the classic pose (see page 88). Regular practice of this asana helps relieve stiffness in the hips, groin, and in the hamstring muscles.

PROPS (see page 164) A BOLSTER AND TWO WOODEN BLOCKS. The bolster below the buttocks lifts the abdomen and relaxes

the groin, allowing the knees to descend easily. A block under each knee relieves stiffness in the hips.

CAUTIONS

Practise this asana sitting against a wall if you have asthma, bronchitis, breathlessness, rheumatoid arthritis, peptic ulcers, or premenstrual stress. Ensure that your lower spine does not become concave, as this will strain your waist and hips.

1 Sit on a bolster placed at right angles to your body (see inset below). Place a block on either side of your hips. Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Bend your knees and join both soles together. Pull your heels closer to the bolster.



Beginners may find it easier to use a bolster positioned parallel to the hips (see inset above).

BENEFITS

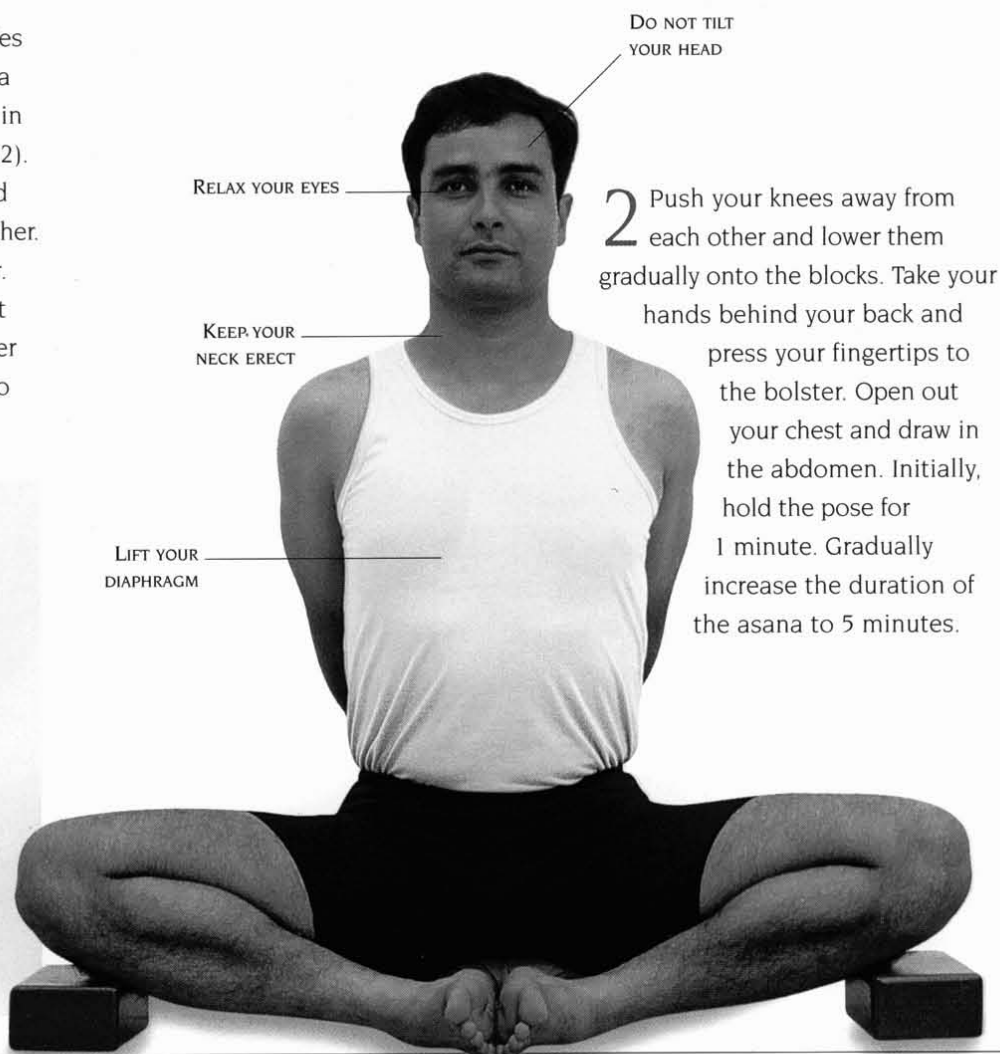
Stimulates the heart and improves circulation in the entire body

Tones the spine, and the abdominal and pelvic organs

Prevents hernia

Alleviates sciatica and varicose veins

Reduces menstrual pain, irregular periods, and leukorrhoea



2 Push your knees away from each other and lower them gradually onto the blocks. Take your hands behind your back and press your fingertips to the bolster. Open out your chest and draw in the abdomen. Initially, hold the pose for 1 minute. Gradually increase the duration of the asana to 5 minutes.

Swastikasana

- Cross-legged pose -

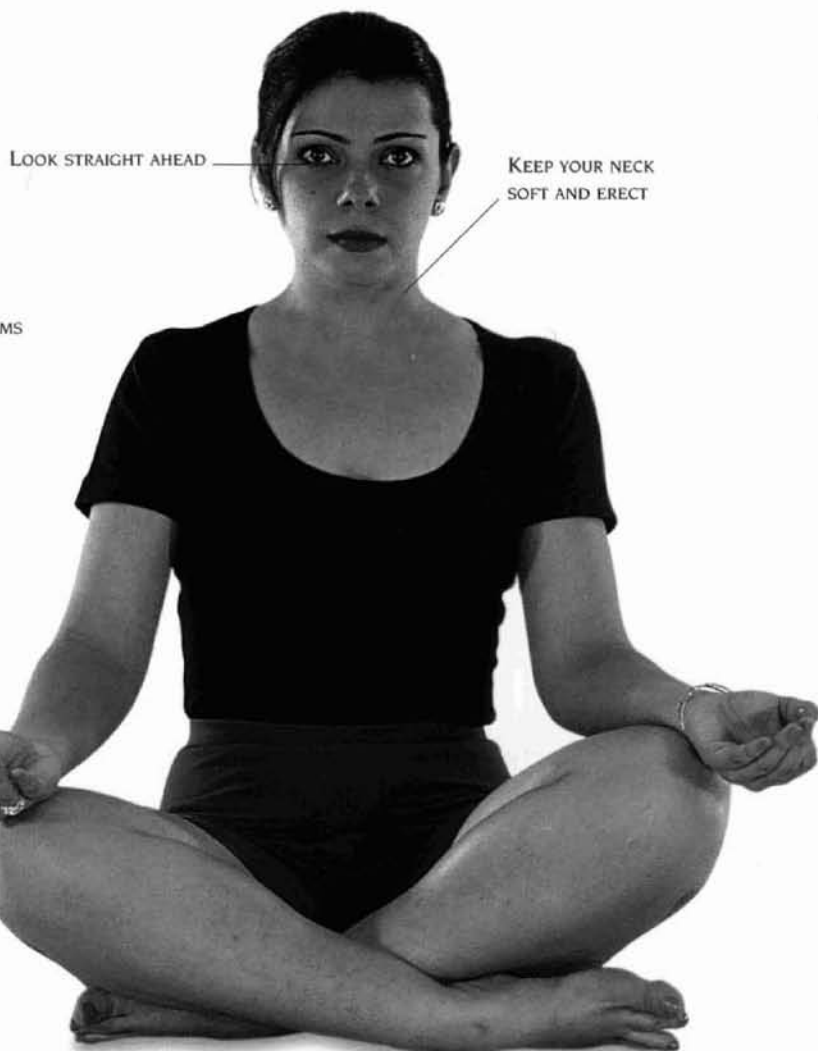


IN SANSKRIT, *swastika* means "crossed legs". This asana is one of the basic poses of yoga and symbolizes its meditative spirituality and physical rigour. Regular practice improves blood circulation in the legs. This asana is recommended for those

who have to stay on their feet for long periods. The pose also calms and rejuvenates the mind.

CAUTIONS

If your feet ache while performing the asana, place a folded blanket under them. Beginners should hold the pose for only 20-30 seconds.



1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Stretch your spine and open your chest. Bend your knees. Place your right foot under the left thigh, and your left foot under your right thigh.

BENEFITS

- ◆ Rests tired feet and legs
- ◆ Reduces inflammation of the veins in the legs
- ◆ Makes the hip joint and groin supple
- ◆ Strengthens the cartilage of the knees and relieves pain in the knees
- ◆ Improves circulation and reduces inflammation in the knees

2 Cross your legs. Then place your hands on your knees, palms facing up. Keep your fingers together. Your neck and spine should be straight and erect, but not tensed. Hold the pose for 30-60 seconds.

Paripurna Navasana

- Complete boat pose -



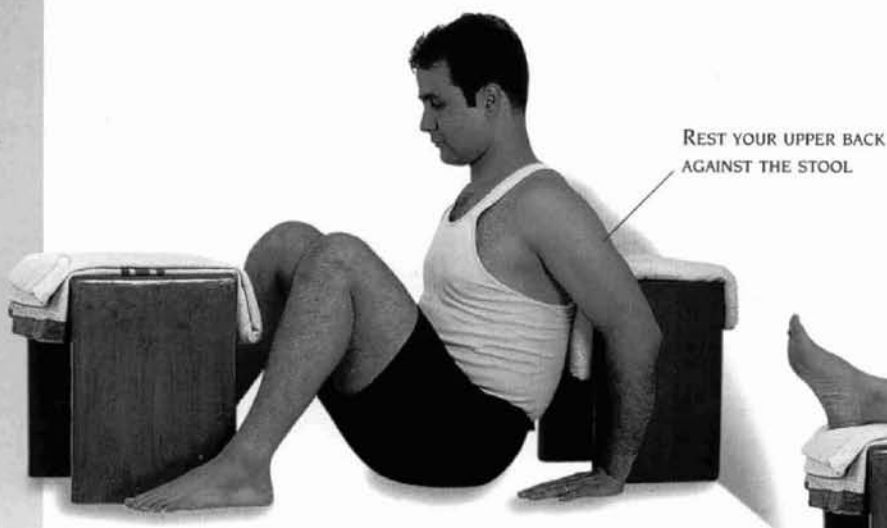
IN THIS ASANA, the body takes the shape of a boat. The word *paripurna* means "complete" or "full" in Sanskrit, while *nava* means "boat". The use of props in this asana allows the pose to be held without straining your stomach and back muscles. Regular practice of this asana tones the muscles and abdominal organs. It also exercises the neck and stimulates the thyroid gland.

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL, TWO HALF-HALASANA STOOLS, TWO BLANKETS, A MAT. The stools support the legs and back, freeing the abdomen of tension. The mat is spread on the floor, and the two blankets cushion the back and legs.

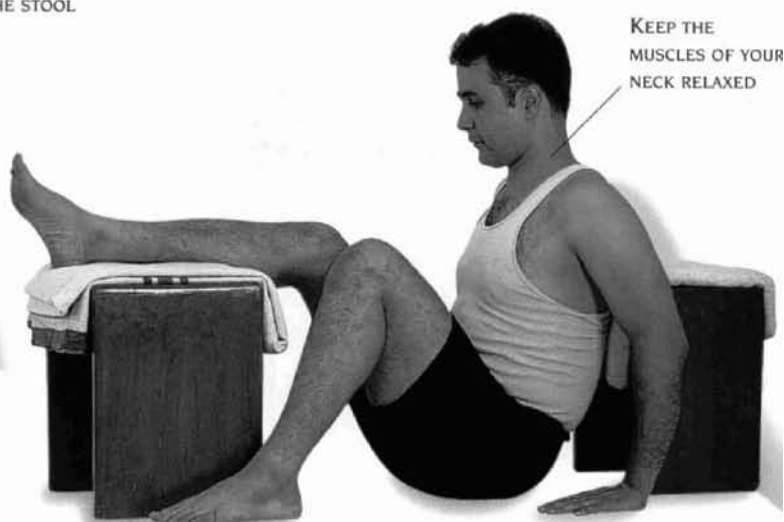
SPECIFIC CAUTIONS The stools are essential until your stomach muscles, arms, legs, and back are strong enough to allow you to hold the pose on your own. Ensure that your neck and head are not strained during practice.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have a cardiac condition or low blood pressure. Avoid the pose if you have breathlessness, asthma, bronchitis, a cold and congestion, migraine, chronic fatigue syndrome, or insomnia, cervical spondylosis, severe backache, diarrhoea, or menstrual disorders.



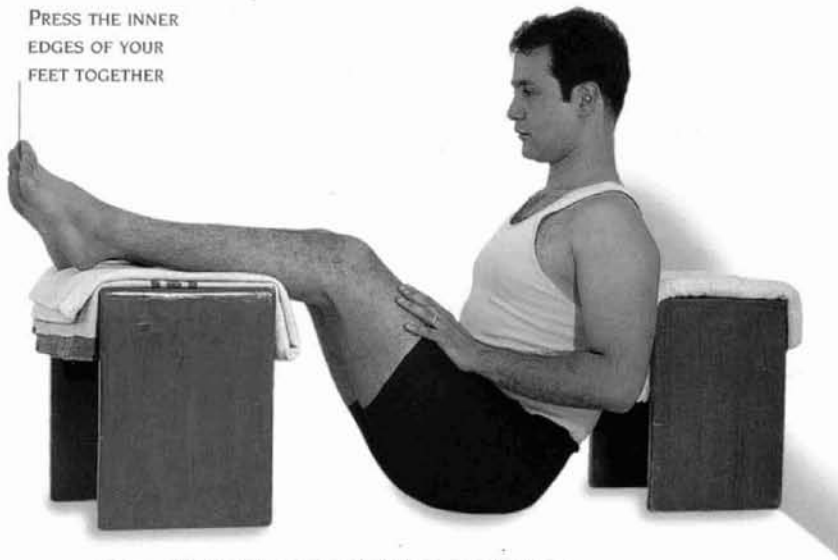
1 Spread a mat on the floor, its short side against a wall. Place a stool against the wall. Place the other stool about 1.2m (4ft) away from the first stool, in line with it. Place a folded blanket on each stool. Sit between both stools, resting your back against the stool touching the wall. Place your palms behind your buttocks, fingers pointing forward. Bend your knees.



KEEP YOUR FEET RELAXED

2 Sit on your buttock bones and press your palms down on the mat. Raise your right leg and place your calf on the stool in front of you. Your heel should rest on the stool. Breathe evenly.

PRESS THE INNER
EDGES OF YOUR
FEET TOGETHER



BENEFITS

◆ Stimulates the thyroid gland,
increasing the body's metabolic rate

◆ Improves blood circulation
in the abdomen

◆ Tones the abdominal muscles
and organs

◆ Relieves indigestion and flatulence

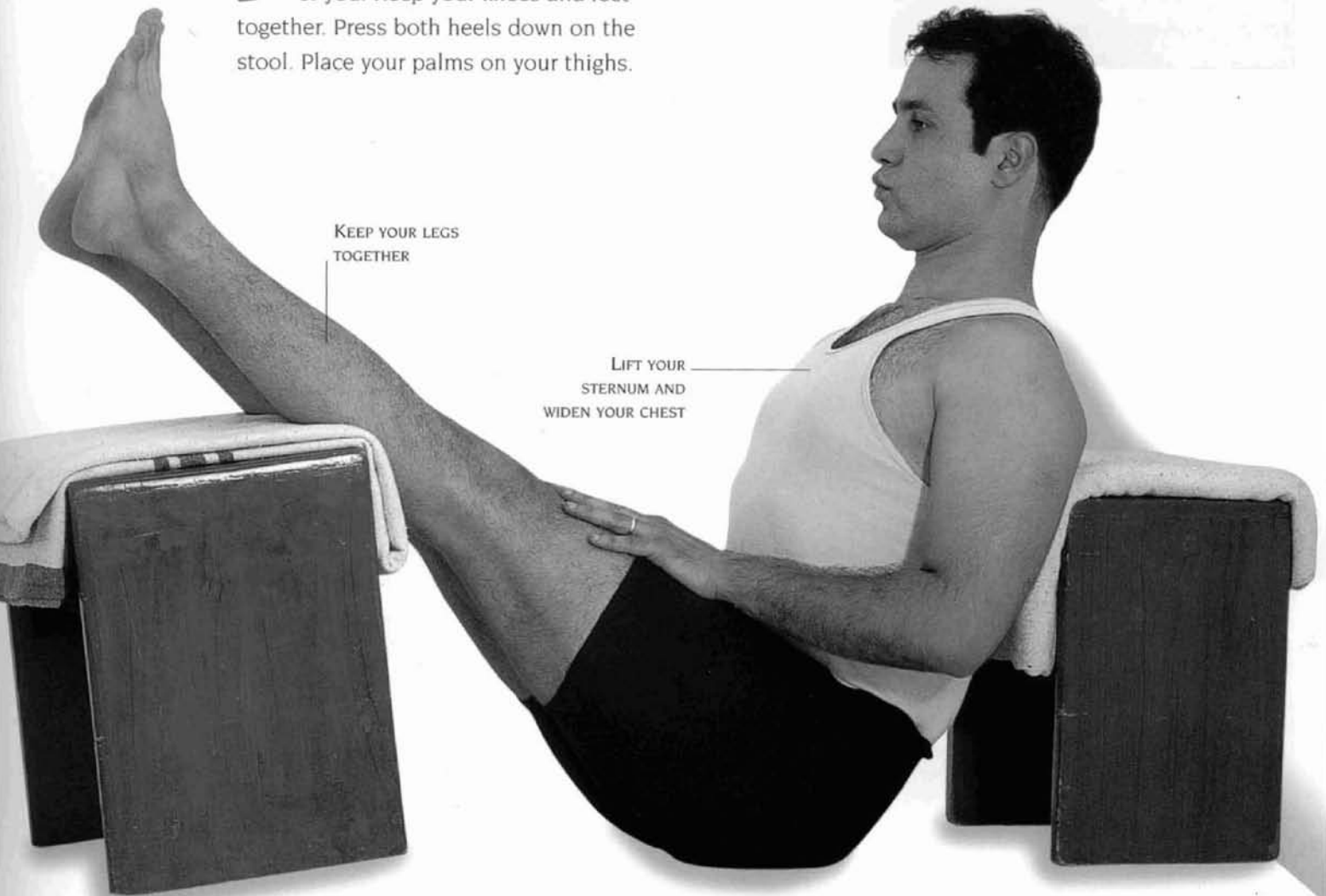
◆ Tones the kidneys

◆ Reduces lower backache by
strengthening the spinal muscles

3 Now raise your left leg, and place the left calf on the stool in front of you. Keep your knees and feet together. Press both heels down on the stool. Place your palms on your thighs.

KEEP YOUR LEGS
TOGETHER

LIFT YOUR
STERNUM AND
WIDEN YOUR CHEST



4 Exhale, and place your palms back on the floor. Press them down and stretch your torso upward. Pull in your shoulder blades. Straighten your legs and lift your calves off the stool, tilting the stool away from

your buttocks. Place your palms back on your thighs. Rotate your thigh muscles inward. Feel the extension of your legs. Keep your abdomen soft. Hold the pose for 1 minute, increasing the duration to 5 minutes with practice.

VARIATION I Two Yoga Belts

PROPS (See page 164) Two YOGA BELTS, buckled, to support the feet and back.

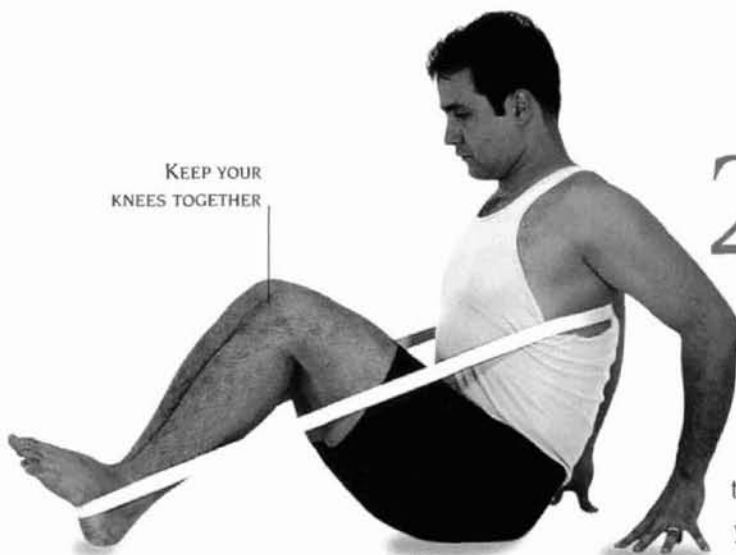
SPECIFIC CAUTION Ensure that you position the belt around your upper back. Placing it around your lumbar or middle back can cause pain.

RAISE YOUR TOES
OFF THE FLOOR



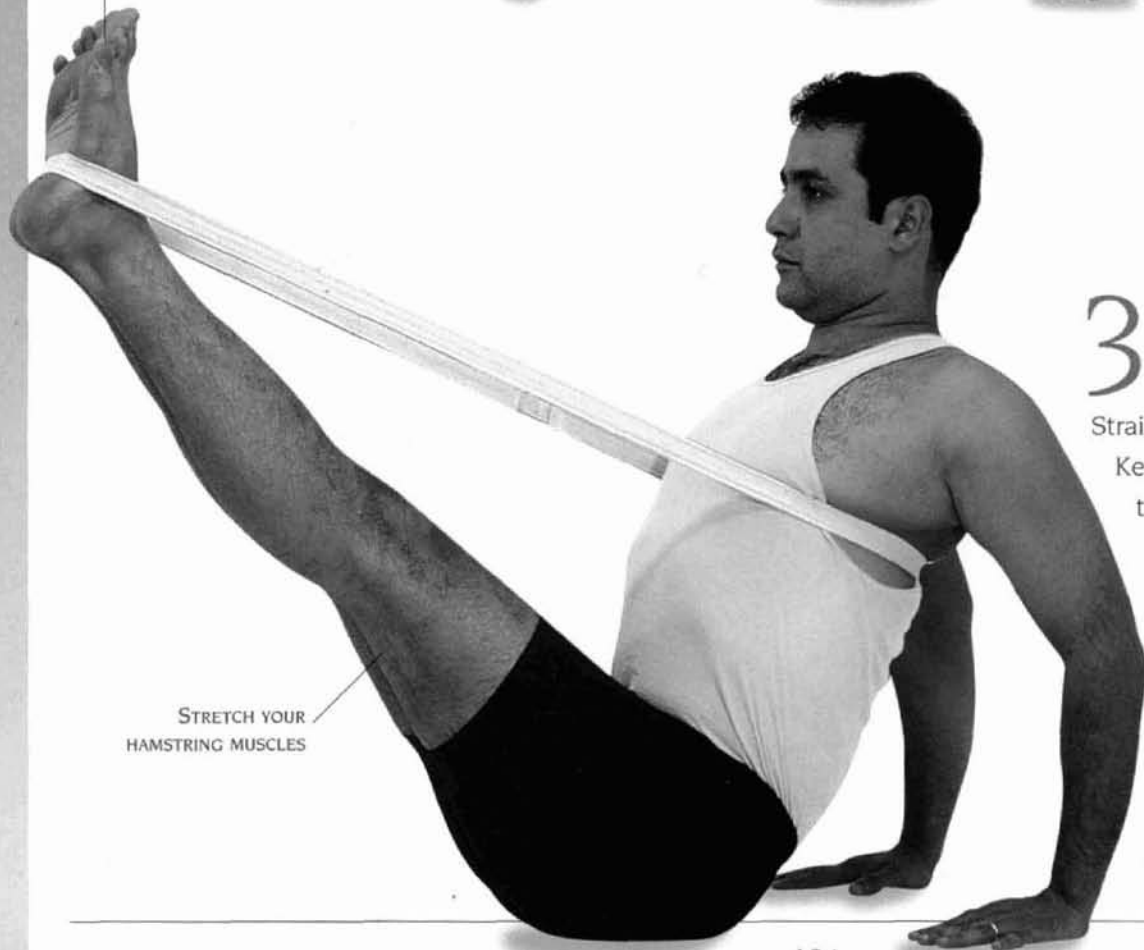
1 Sit on a mat. Buckle the belts together. Bend your knees. Take the belt over your head, and place one end of the belt around the upper back, just below the shoulder blades. Loop the other end around the soles of the feet, just above the heels. Tighten the belts to a suitable length – they should not feel too slack or too tight.

KEEP YOUR
KNEES TOGETHER



2 Place your hands behind your hips, approximately 15-20cm (6-8in) apart, fingers pointing forward. Press your fingertips to the floor. Move your hands back slightly. Keep both heels on the floor, with the toes pointing forward. Press the knees and feet together. Keep your shoulders and back straight.

EXTEND THE SOLES
OF YOUR FEET



STRETCH YOUR
HAMSTRING MUSCLES

3 Press your palms down firmly on the floor to support your body. Slowly raise your feet off the floor. Straighten and stretch your legs upward. Keep the spine erect, from the tailbone to the back of your neck. Lift your sternum and open your chest. Relax your facial muscles. Be conscious of the stretch of your legs and torso. Your abdomen should be soft and relaxed. Hold the pose for 1 minute. With practice, increase the duration to 5 minutes. Breathe evenly.

Upavista Konasana

- Seated wide-angle pose -



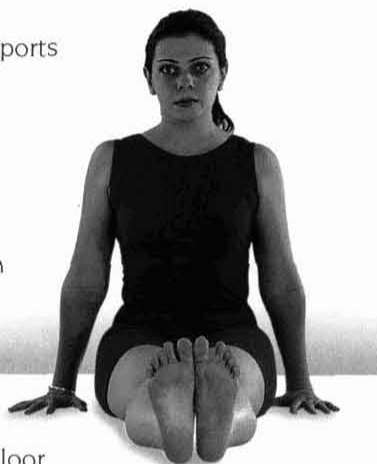
THIS VERSION OF Upavista Konasana is adapted to help beginners and those with stiff backs to stretch the legs out to the sides, omitting the forward bend of the original asana. The pose gets its name from the Sanskrit words *upavista*, which means "seated", and *kona*, which translates into "angle". This asana relaxes stress-related tension in the abdominal muscles.

CAUTIONS

If you have asthma, you must practise this asana sitting on a folded blanket. The wall and blanket lift and open the chest, allowing for easy breathing. Avoid practising this asana during menstruation.

PROPS (See page 164) A WALL supports the back and eases breathing.

1 Sit against a wall. Then sit in Dandasana (see page 82) with your shoulders and back touching the wall. Keep your back erect. Sit on your buttock bones. Place your palms on the floor, beside your hips, fingers pointing forward. Look straight ahead.



2 Press your palms down on the floor to push your torso upward. Exhale, and spread your legs as far apart as possible. Use your hands, one by one, to help you to push your legs even further out to the sides.

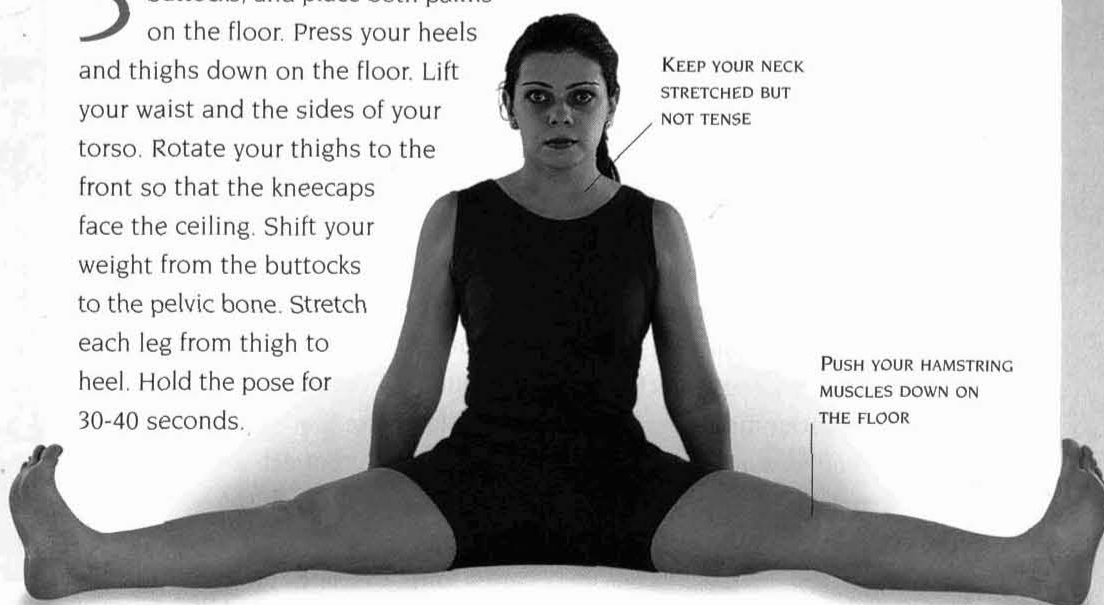


POINT YOUR TOES TO THE CEILING

BENEFITS

- ◆ Helps to treat arthritis of the hips
- ◆ Relieves sciatic pain
- ◆ Helps to prevent and relieve hernia
- ◆ Massages the organs of the reproductive system
- ◆ Stimulates the ovaries, regulates menstrual flow, and relieves menstrual disorders
- ◆ Corrects a prolapsed uterus or bladder

3 Move your hands behind your buttocks, and place both palms on the floor. Press your heels and thighs down on the floor. Lift your waist and the sides of your torso. Rotate your thighs to the front so that the kneecaps face the ceiling. Shift your weight from the buttocks to the pelvic bone. Stretch each leg from thigh to heel. Hold the pose for 30-40 seconds.



KEEP YOUR NECK STRETCHED BUT NOT TENSE

PUSH YOUR HAMSTRING MUSCLES DOWN ON THE FLOOR

Paschimottanasana

- Intense back stretch -



THIS VERSION OF Paschimottanasana uses five combinations of props that make the pose less strenuous than the classic asana (see page 102). These variations, which give an intense stretch to the back, relieve lower backache and make the spine more supple. When practised, this asana cools the brain, calms the mind, and rejuvenates the entire body.

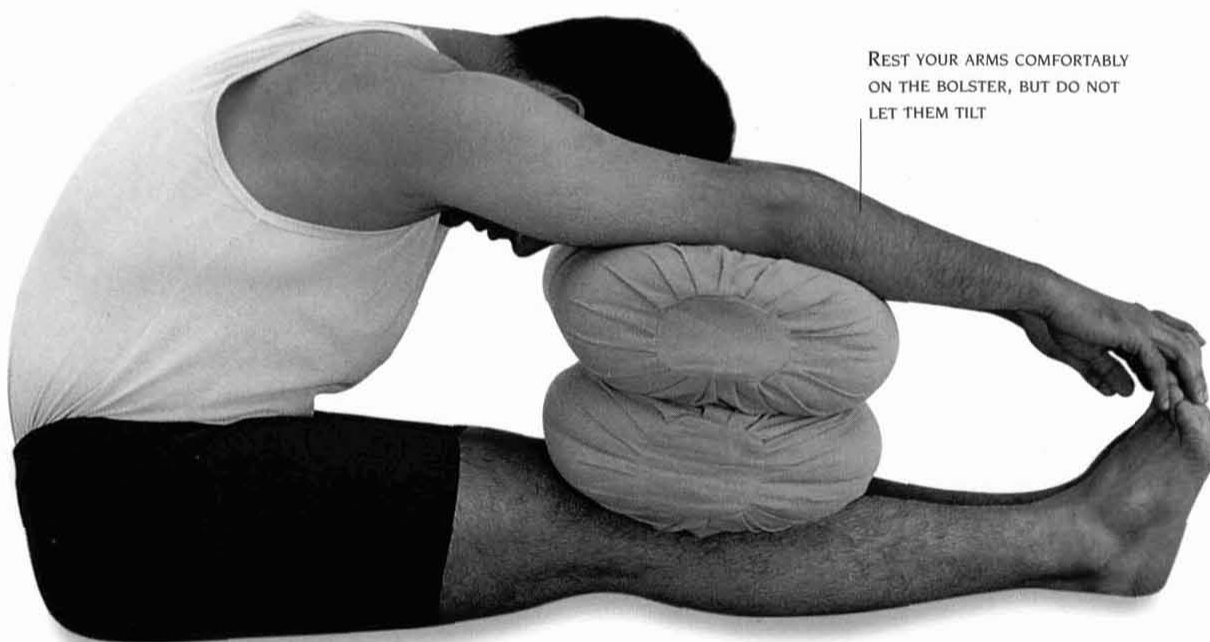
CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have asthma, bronchitis, or diarrhoea. Do not practise this pose if you have cervical spondylosis.

PROPS (See page 164) TWO BOLSTERS support the head and allow people with stiff backs to hold the pose more easily.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Prevents sciatica and varicose veins. Relieves arthritis

of the shoulders and elbows. Improves the circulation of blood in the arms, strengthening the elbow and wrist joints. Rests tired feet and legs. Helps to treat incontinence.

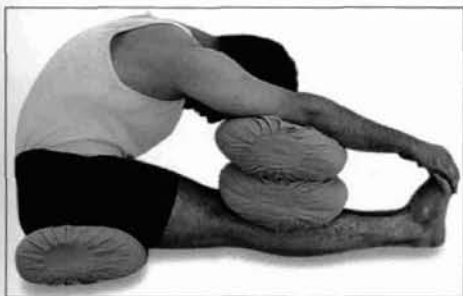


REST YOUR ARMS COMFORTABLY ON THE BOLSTER, BUT DO NOT LET THEM TILT

1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 82). Place 2 bolsters, one on top of the other, across your knees. Make sure that your ankles, heels, and big toes are close together. Stretch your arms over the bolsters and bend forward. Hold your feet just below the toes, keeping both legs straight. Press your thighs and knees together.

2 Bend from the base of your spine and push your waist forward. Elongate your torso toward your feet, stretching it from the groin to the navel. Make sure that your abdominal muscles do not contract. Rest your elbows and forehead on the bolsters. Keep the muscles of your thighs and calves fully stretched.

3 Stretch your neck. Push both your shoulders down and back, moving them away from your ears. Rest your forehead evenly on the bolsters, and do not tilt your head to one side. Your arms should be straight, but not tensed. Consciously relax your neck, face, eyes, and ears. Breathe evenly, and stay in this pose for 5 minutes.



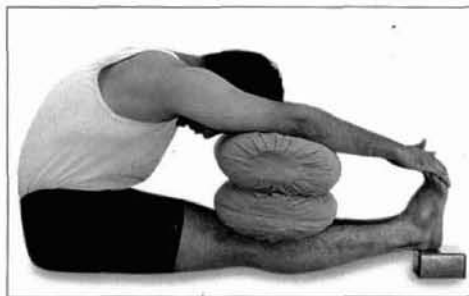
VARIATION 1
Three Bolsters

PROPS (See page 164) **THREE BOLSTERS.** Sitting on a bolster gives the torso height, making the forward bend easier.

SPECIFIC CAUTION Avoid this variation if you have varicose veins.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Reduces acidity and prevents ulcers. Relieves menstrual pain and premenstrual stress. Helps to treat stress-related disorders of the reproductive system. Prevents fibroid formation. Regulates menstrual flow by relaxing the uterine muscles. Relieves vaginal dryness and itching.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place a bolster behind you, so that the centre of the long side touches the back of the buttocks. Bend your knees. Press your palms down on the bolster and place your buttocks on it. Now follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana.



VARIATION 2
Two Bolsters and a Block

PROPS (See page 164) **TWO BOLSTERS AND A WOODEN BLOCK.** The block under the heels gives the legs an intense stretch.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Relieves arthritis of the shoulders and elbows. Alleviates osteoarthritis of the knees and ankles. Prevents varicose veins and sciatic pain. Reinvigorates tired feet.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Position the block near your feet with its long side facing you. Place your heels, one by one, on the block, supporting the backs of your knees with your hands. Now follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana. Make sure that you do not contract your leg muscles. Extend your thigh muscles and keep your knees firmly down on the floor.

BENEFITS

- ◆ Sharpens memory
- ◆ Soothes the sympathetic nervous system
- ◆ Prevents fatigue
- ◆ Rests the heart, normalizes blood pressure and the pulse rate
- ◆ Reduces angina pain
- ◆ Relieves chronic headaches, migraine, and eye strain.
- ◆ Reduces stress in the facial muscles
- ◆ Alleviates stress-related compression or a feeling of tightness in the throat and diaphragm
- ◆ Improves blood circulation in the pelvic area, toning the pelvic organs
- ◆ Regulates blood supply to the endocrine glands, activating the adrenal glands, and relaxing the thyroid gland
- ◆ Cools the temperature of the skin
- ◆ Strengthens the vertebral joints and stretches the ligaments of the spine

“It is while practising yoga asanas that you learn the art of adjustment.”



VARIATION 3

Two Bolsters and a Belt

PROPS (See page 164) A BELT AND TWO BOLSTERS. The belt helps those who are too stiff to hold their feet.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Rests tired feet. Relieves osteoarthritis of the ankles. Prevents sciatica and varicose veins.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Follow Step 1 of the main asana, but separate your legs to a distance of 30cm (1ft). Point your toes toward the ceiling. Hold one end of the belt in each hand and loop it over your feet. Keep shortening the length of the belt until the pull feels intense. Then follow Steps 2 and 3 of the main asana. Widen your elbows and keep the belt taut.



VARIATION 4

Two Bolsters and a Stool

PROPS (See page 164) A LOW, OPEN STOOL AND TWO BOLSTERS. The stool helps you to stretch your arms and spine. It relaxes the back of the head, throat, diaphragm, chest, and back.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS Helps to relieve depression. Stimulates the liver and kidneys. Reduces ulcers, flatulence, constipation, and indigestion. Prevents varicose veins and sciatic pain. Relieves osteoarthritis of the hips. Prevents fibroids. Relieves vaginal itching. If practised during menstruation, regulates menstrual flow and reduces menstrual pain. Relieves stress-related headaches and migraine if practised with a crepe bandage around the eyes.

GETTING INTO THE POSE Place the stool on the floor. Sit in Dandasana and stretch your legs through the stool. Separate your legs until they touch the inner sides of the stool. Then follow Steps 1, 2, and 3 of the main asana, but do not hold your toes. Stretch your arms over the bolsters, and hold the further edge of the stool. Rest your forehead on the top



bolster and close your eyes. Breathe evenly. This variation, if practised with the

feet together (see inset) relaxes the neck, diaphragm, and back.

“Focus on keeping your spine straight. It is the job of the spine to keep the brain alert.”

Adhomukha Paschimottanasana

- Downward-facing intense back stretch -



IN SANSKRIT, *paschim* literally means "west". In yogic terms, this refers to the back of the whole body, from the heels to the head. Although this asana stretches this region intensely, the props enable you to hold the pose comfortably, without strain.

Regular practice of the asana tones the liver and kidneys. The stretch also alleviates lower backache.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have an attack of diarrhoea, or if you are experiencing the symptoms of asthma or bronchitis.

PROPS (see page 164) A LOW, OPEN STOOL AND TWO BOLSTERS. The stool gives the torso height and helps those with stiff backs to bend forward easily. The bolsters support the torso and help to make the pose restful and relaxing.

1 Sit on the front edge of the stool and place 2 bolsters beside it. Hold the stool and straighten your legs, keeping your legs and feet together. Place a bolster on your legs, parallel to them. Place the second bolster on top of the first, but about 5cm (2-3in) closer to your toes. Straighten your back and stretch your torso upward. Take several breaths.

2 Look down and push your torso toward your legs. Stretch your arms out over the bolsters. Ensure that you stretch from the base of the spine. Keep your abdomen soft and breathe normally. Stretch your hands beyond the bolsters and hold the upper soles of your feet.

3 Rest your chest comfortably on the bolsters and place your forehead on the top bolster. Now, holding on to your feet, extend your torso down even further. If you cannot reach your toes, rest your hands as far down on the top bolster as possible. Hold the pose for 1 minute. With practice, increase the duration to 5 minutes.

PUSH YOUR
SPINE FORWARD

SIT ON THE FRONT
EDGE OF THE STOOL

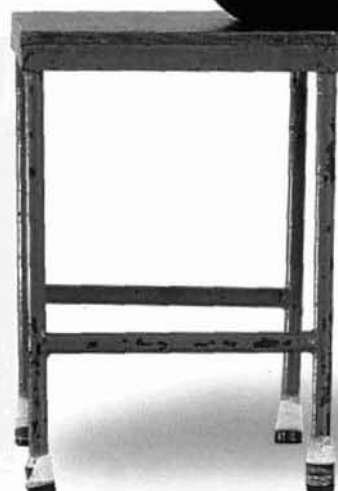
BENEFITS

Relieves stress-related appetite loss

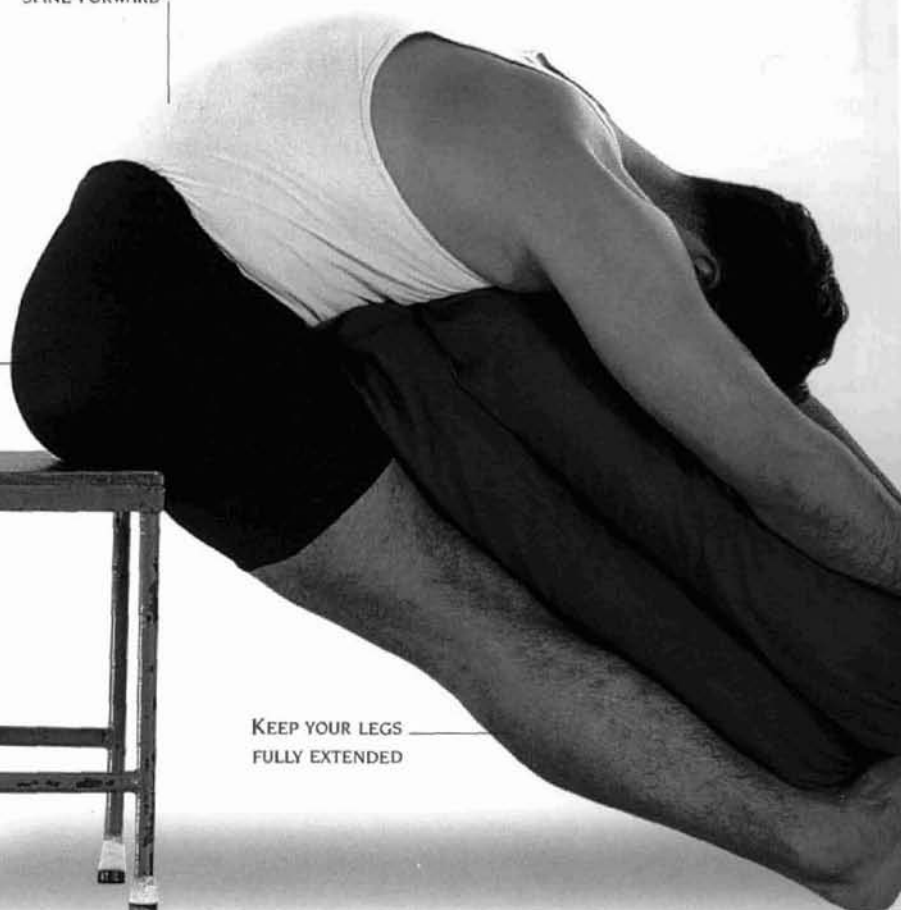
Helps in the treatment of acidity, ulcers, anorexia, bulimia, and alcoholism

Tones the liver and kidneys

Relieves lower backache



KEEP YOUR LEGS
FULLY EXTENDED



Janu Sirsasana

- Head-on-knee pose -



THIS ASANA CALMS the brain and the sympathetic nervous system. The mind detaches itself from the senses and feelings of restlessness and irritability are soothed. This adapted version of the classic pose (see page 94) is supported by props. It rests the heart and activates the *anahata* or "heart" *chakra* (see page 37), helping to treat depression and alleviate insomnia.

PROPS (See page 164) A BOLSTER, A BLANKET, AND A LOW, OPEN STOOL. The bolster and blanket support the head and help those with stiff backs to bend forward easily. The low, open

stool facilitates the arm extension from the shoulders to the fingers. It also relaxes and stretches the back of the head and neck, creating a traction-like extension of the spine.

CAUTIONS

Do not practise this asana if you have asthma or bronchitis. Avoid the pose if you have diarrhoea as it will aggravate the condition. If your knees are stiff, or if you have osteoarthritis of the knees, practise with a wooden block under the bent knee. If you have a stress-related headache or migraine, practise the asana with a crepe bandage over your eyes.

1 Place a low stool on the floor. Sit in Dandasana (see page 82) with your feet through it. Sit on your buttock bones. Press your palms to the floor beside your hips and straighten your back. Bend your left leg and bring the heel to your groin. Your toes should

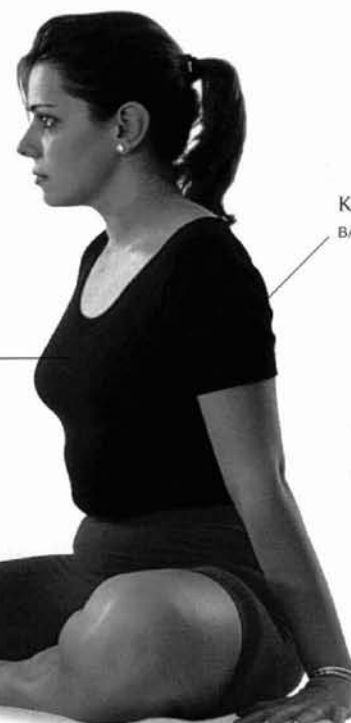
touch your right thigh and your legs should be at an obtuse angle. Push the bent knee as far back as you can. Keep your right leg absolutely straight. Place the bolster across your right calf, and place a folded blanket on top of it for added height.

PLACE THE STOOL
IN LINE WITH
YOUR CHEST



KEEP YOUR
FOOT UPRIGHT

EXPAND YOUR CHEST



KEEP YOUR
BACK ERECT

PRESS YOUR FINGERS
TO THE FLOOR

2 Exhale, and bend forward from the base of your spine, not from the shoulder blades. Stretch your arms over the bolster and rest your palms on the stool. Keep your left knee pressed to the floor.



PUSH YOUR
TORSO FORWARD

STRETCH THE RIGHT
LEG FROM THIGH
TO HEEL

3 Push your torso forward and hold the far edge of the stool. Stretch from the groin to the navel. Do not allow your abdomen to contract as you bend forward. Rest your forehead on the blanket and close your eyes. Exhale slowly to release the tension in your neck and head. Stay in this position for approximately 1 minute. Repeat the pose on the other side.



KEEP YOUR HEAD
AND NECK RELAXED

EXTEND YOUR
SPINE FORWARD

BENEFITS

- ◆ Sharpens the memory
- ◆ Relieves chronic headaches, migraine, or eye strain
- ◆ Helps to normalize blood pressure
- ◆ Reduces angina pain
- ◆ Reduces stress-related appetite loss
- ◆ Vitalizes the adrenal gland and relaxes the thyroid gland
- ◆ Improves bladder control
- ◆ Prevents enlargement of the prostate gland
- ◆ Reduces menstrual cramps and relieves dryness and itching in the vagina
- ◆ Prevents fibroids and regulates menstrual flow