
Restorative 101

Rebalancing & Renewing

course pack • naadayoga • March 2011

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Restorative 101

Rebalancing & Renewing

OVERVIEW



The body is your temple. Keep it pure and clean for the soul to reside in. B.K.S. Iyengar

Overview

This module will examine the basic principles of a restorative yoga practice and how to use a variety of props to support the body in various asanas. Poses are held longer to allow a deeper exploration that goes beyond a musculo-skeletal experience of asanas. This will enable the student to understand how the practice can calm, rebalance, and support the body on several levels: physiologically, systemically, organically and pranically. We will also examine the effects of inversions, the foundation of any restorative practice, in more detail and how to create a safe practice environment for students in these poses.

Objectives

When you have completed this module, you should be able to:

1. Know how to incorporate restorative poses into your yoga practice and support students in theirs.
2. Understand the deeper effects of a well-sequenced restorative yoga practice.
3. Understand how to create a safe practice environment for exploring restorative poses, including inversions, such as headstand and shoulder-stand.
4. Be familiar with how to use props, including chairs, blocks, bolsters, belts, blankets, and variations on the Yoga Wall, if appropriate.

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INTRODUCTION

Any balanced yoga practice should include a restorative sequence at least once a week. Restorative yoga can help support your energy through a weekly practice and also help build energy during times when your system feels depleted. The purpose of restorative yoga is to restore balance to body and mind. Restorative yoga poses offer us the opportunity to slow down, go deeper into poses in more subtle ways, develop and cultivate a capacity for listening to more subtle body cues, and offer overall support for our bodily systems (e.g. endocrine, cardiovascular, lymphatic/immune system). This is distinguished from recuperative yoga, whose aim is to help someone recuperate or recover from injury or other trauma, and involves a rehabilitative aspect to rebuild capacity, strength, and flexibility - physically, psychologically and emotionally - following such incidents.

Restorative poses open the body, while allowing the nervous system to rest. Props and other means of supporting the musculo-skeletal system are used (e.g. blocks, straps, bolsters, chairs, blankets), so that poses are not “held” muscularly. This enables the body to deeply release with the breath. As we release in a supported manner and remain connected to the breath, we can remain much longer in the pose while expending minimal energy, so that the benefits of each asana can be felt more profoundly. This restful approach provides an opportunity to renew and rebalance in a conscious way. Note that “rest” is different than sleep. In the practice one remains aware and conscious of the movements of breath and mind.

Restorative yoga, as well as other forms of yoga, encourage a response from the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The PNS is responsible for the “rest and relaxation” response. The sympathetic nervous system is responsible for the “fight or flight” response, and is associated with stress and over-stimulation, which is often how most of society is functioning. In terms of offering balance on larger scale, a restorative yoga practice can help counter the effects of the continued stress that we live with. Some of the benefits of stimulating the PNS are: lowered heart rate, reduced blood pressure, increased circulation to all organs, immune system support, proper function of the digestive system, and increased production of endorphins (the “feel-good” hormones).

Although all body systems benefit from a restorative practice, below are some examples of how some of the body’s main systems are supported by the practice:

- *Nervous System* – Both the peripheral and central nervous system are very susceptible to stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. If our nervous is over-loaded, all body systems and our emotional and psychological well-being is compromised. The longer-held poses in a restorative practice allow body, breath and mind to slow down, and encourage an overall relaxation response.
- *Cardiac system* – supported inverted poses, a mainstay of any restorative practice, encourages venous return in a gentle, steady manner, reducing tissue congestion and allowing the heart and lungs to better function.

- *Lymphatic system* – unlike the cardiac system, the lymphatic system does not function by means of a “pumping” action, but rather relies on the movement of muscles and breath to move the lymph fluid through tissues, which helps with “detoxification” and proper immune function. By incorporating supported inversions and by gently encouraging an opening of the groins, armpits and chest in other poses, a restorative practice allows the lymph to flow to the areas of the body where the lymph tissue is concentrated.

With restorative yoga, you also become more familiar with the subtleties of your body and breath, noticing patterns of thought, the inner movements of mind that can either interfere or open us to practice in ways we may not have to be aware of in a “regular” yoga practice. In effect, we start to notice the ways in which we have been keeping ourselves “out” of practice as much as “in” the practice.

HOW RESTORATIVE YOGA WORKS

Judith Lasater one of the foremost teachers of restorative yoga, offers this outline of how restorative yoga works from her book, *Relax and Renew* (Rodmell Press, 1995).

- 1) Restorative poses help relieve the effects of chronic stress in several ways. First, the use of props as described in this book provides a completely supportive environment for total relaxation.
- 2) Second, each restorative sequence is designed to move the spine in all directions. These movements illustrate the age-old wisdom of yoga that teaches well-being is enhanced by a healthy spine. Some of the restorative poses are backbends, while others are forward bends. Additional poses gently twist the column both left and right.
- 3) Third, a well-sequenced restorative practice also includes an inverted pose, which reverses the effects of gravity. This can be as simple as putting the legs on a bolster or pillow, but the effects are quite dramatic. Because we stand or sit most of the day, blood and lymph fluid accumulate in the lower extremities. By changing the relationship of the legs to gravity, fluids are returned to the upper body and heart function is enhanced.

Psychobiologist and yoga teacher Roger Cole, PhD, consultant to the University of California, San Diego in sleep research and biological rhythms, has done preliminary research on the effects of inverted poses. He found that they dramatically alter hormone levels, thus reducing brain arousal, blood pressure, and fluid retention. He attributes these benefits to a slowing of the heart rate and dilation of the blood vessels in the upper body that comes from reversing the effects of gravity.

- 4) Fourth, restorative yoga alternately stimulates and soothes the organs. For example, by closing the abdomen with a forward bend and then opening it with a backbend, the abdominal organs are squeezed, forcing the blood out, and then opened, so that fresh blood returns to soak

the organs. With this movement of blood comes the enhanced exchange of oxygen and waste products across the cell membrane.

5) Finally, yoga teaches that the body is permeated with energy. Prana, the masculine energy, resides above the diaphragm, moves upward, and controls respiration and heart rate. Apana, the feminine energy, resides below the diaphragm, moves downward, and controls the function of the abdominal organs. Restorative yoga balances these two aspects of energy so that the practitioner is neither overstimulated nor depleted.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Inner softening. When doing any restorative pose, focus on softening your sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin), the “organs of perception.” Your teeth and lips should be gently parted, allowing the upper palate to remain soft. Your tongue should relax onto your lower palate, not press on your upper palate, and descend back and downward. This tongue position is key in all the restorative poses and in pranayama. Although it may feel awkward at first, practice it until it feels natural. Your throat should remain relaxed and soft, although in some inversions the full “chin-lock” position (jalandhara-bandha), chest to throat/chin, will be naturally engaged and this may sometimes create feelings of unease or even panic. Focus on your exhalation until you can feel your chest and throat relaxing. The abdominal organs should also remain soft. If the outer foundation of the pose is properly established, this inner softening should not cause any sense of “collapse”, misalignment, or difficulty in breathing.

Additional supports. Since metabolism will slow down during a restorative practice and body temperature can drop by up to one-degree, it is a good idea to wear a long-sleeved shirt and to have a sweater or blanket nearby to cover your body for warmth. The use of an eye-pillow or head-wrap can also provide a break from sensory overload and encourage a deep inward focus.

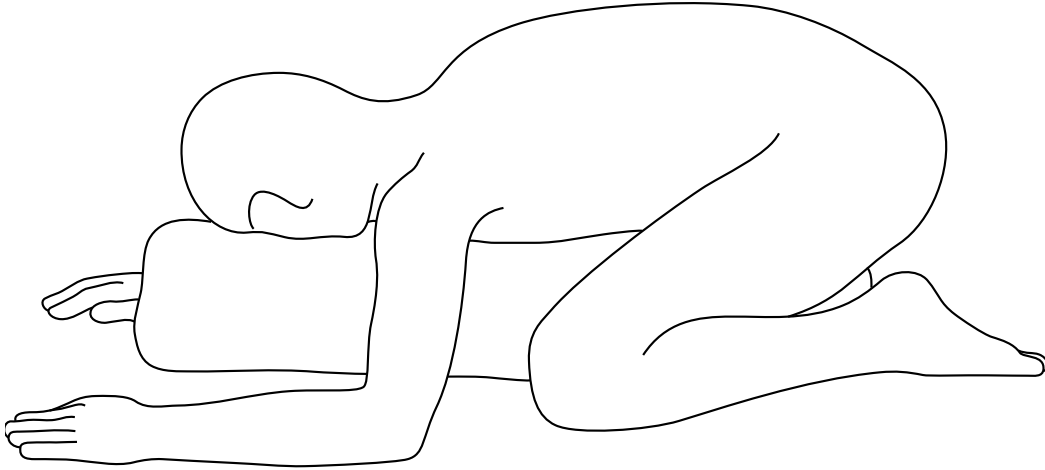
Pain or discomfort. Do not ever tolerate pain, numbness or tingling during a restorative (or any) yoga practice. These are signs that you are trying to do too much or that the pose has not been set up properly for your body. You need to find a way to modify the pose and/ or the way that props are being used to return to a comfortable position. Or, perhaps you simply should not be practising that pose either because of injury or other factors. Whether practicing or teaching, if you are ever unsure if you or someone should be in pose because of pain or a pre-existing medical condition or injury, always veer on the side of caution, particularly with inversions, and offer a variation on the pose that is more, rather than less, supported. Better to do less than push into unknown territory.

Emotional releases/resistance. Since poses are being held longer and deeper, the effects occur on more subtle levels. This can sometimes manifest as emotional releases (e.g. laughter, tears, anger, fear) as our “hold” on ways of suppressing these feeling or patterned ways of dealing with them is released or challenged. Fascia, the connective tissue that is continuous through the body, is where “knots” or adhesions can occur. Often in longer-held poses, as fascia releases, memories- and emotions surrounding these memories - are also released. Allow this to occur. If you are teaching, try to be supportive but not interfering in a student’s process through this,

since each person will deal with this differently. Use your discretion and judgment in a group setting; check in with the student post-class if necessary. Often, a simple pose such as *balasana* or simply lying on their side, supported by a bolster is sufficient to support someone through such releases. If there is anger or resistance, frustration or confusion, gently explain how to enter and exit from the pose and allow the student to decide how - or if - they will continue. Once you get to know yourself and your students more in this practice, you may notice that certain emotional reactions are triggered by certain poses, and this would require a different type of exploration.

Timing of poses. In a restorative practice, it is not unusual to hold poses longer, from 3-6 minutes minimum, and up to 10-20 minutes for some of the deeper, supported poses such as *Viparita Karani* or *Svasana*. Understand that each student's capacity (physical, emotional and psychological) to maintain some poses will vary greatly. Explore each pose on your own, to your own personal limit, to better appreciate and understand what may arise with students less experienced, and know how to recognize the cues of when to take yourself, a student, or a class, out of a pose - or when to take them further. We always practice first for ourselves to extend this understanding out to others. Restorative practice goes deeper than we may sometimes realize on the surface. Practice compassion and *ahimsa* (non-harming) to yourself and continually offer this to others.

BALASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Balāsana	Child's Pose	Forward Bend
	Bala- Child	

Benefits:

1. Reduces high blood pressure
2. Stretches and tones the spine, relieving pain in the back and neck.
3. Alleviates menstrual pain.
4. Develops joint and muscle flexibility in the hips, knees and spine.
5. Reduces lower backache.
6. Improves digestion.
7. Increases blood circulation.
8. Helps to alleviate nervous tension, migraine, insomnia, and fatigue.
9. Relaxes the body and eases breathing.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Let the weight of the legs and pelvis descend back and down to the floor. Let the forehead release down so the neck muscles relax.
2. *Primary Movement:* Flexion in both of the hips and spine.

3. *Breath:* Inhale to prepare the spine. Exhale to move into the pose. Exhale to come out of the pose.

Secondary Principles:

1. Spread the toes and soles of the feet.
2. Keep the ankles in line with the shins.
3. Place the big toes together.
4. Relax and spread your sitting bones back behind your toes.
5. Hollow your groins back.
6. Relax your spine to the floor.
7. Relax the shoulders and widen the shoulder blades from the spine.
8. Draw your outer armpits away from the spine and down towards the floor.
9. Spread your fingers and let them drop into the floor.
10. Let your forearms and elbows relax down.
11. Soften your forehead in the direction of your nose.
12. Relax the eyes back and look down the length of the nose.

Common Obstacles:

1. Students will experience discomfort in the ankles if the ankle joints are stiff. Roll up blankets and place them under the front of the ankles.
2. Students will experience discomfort in the hips and have a hard time allowing the pelvis to relax heavy. Place a rolled blanket between the thighs and shins.
3. Pain in the neck if the head is turned to one side. Place a rolled blanket under the forehead to support the head straight.
4. Difficulty to obtain contact between the lower belly and bolster. Place a folded blanket between the belly and bolster.

Variations:

1. Uttitha Balasana (extended child's pose). Extend the arms overhead and lift the elbows to deepen the breath into the chest, arms and head.
2. Use two bolsters with students who need a higher support.
3. Chin reaching away from the chest. Place a rolled blanket under the chin.
4. Place a bolster or two under bent elbows. (Adho mukha virasana)
5. Place the bent elbows onto a chair if the support needs to be higher. (Adho mukha virasana)

Support Poses:

Hip Openers (eg. Supta Padangushtasana, reclined big toe hold)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this pose if you have osteoarthritis of the knees or if you have recently.

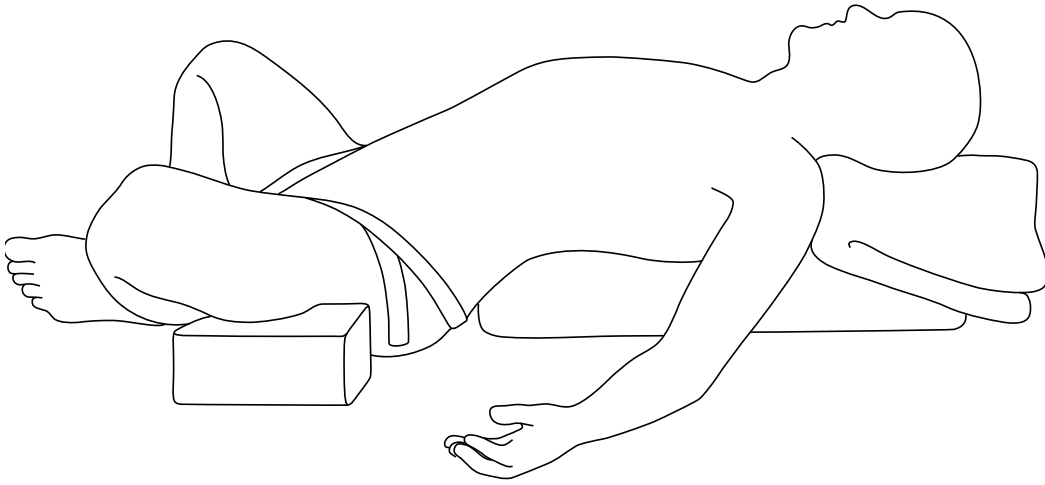
Practice Script:

Sit comfortably at the foot of your mat onto your shins. Straddle a bolster with your thighs, placing your knees wide and your big toes together. Inhale, lay your lower belly forward and relax onto the bolster. Exhale lay your chest down and turn your head comfortably to one side. Relax your head completely and slide your arms and elbows forward and allow them to relax onto the floor. Inhale, let your pelvis release back and try to let go of tension inside your hips. Stay relaxed here and try to deepen your breath. Inhale, walk your hands under the shoulders. Exhale, push the hands down to gently lift the spine to seated.

Reminders:

1. Relax the eyes back and remember to breathe into the back of your body.
2. Let the corners of your mouth lift as a way to feel contentment in the pose.
3. Relax your jaw and neck by slightly parting the teeth on the exhalation.

SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Supta Baddha Konasana	Reclined Bound Angle Pose	Reclined Pose
	Supta- Reclined	
	Baddha - Bound	
	Kona - Angle	

Benefits:

1. Regulates blood pressure.
2. Opens hips and groins.
3. Relieves back pain.
4. Relieves indigestion
5. Supports kidney and adrenal function.
6. Improves blood circulation in the organs of the pelvis.
7. Alleviates menstrual pain.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Let the weight of the legs and pelvis descend to the floor. Let the chest open and the arms and shoulders relax.

2. *Primary Movement:* Flexion in both of the hips. Slight extension in the lumbar spine.
3. *Breath:* Exhale to move into the pose. Inhale to come out of the pose.

Secondary Principles:

1. Let the femurs relax into the hip sockets.
2. Allow the femurs to relax into external rotation.
3. Widen the inside of the thighs towards the knees.
4. Let the arms relax in external rotation with the palms facing the ceiling.
5. Let the chest lift and open.
6. Keep the neck long.
7. Relax the ankles and knees completely.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the hips. Make sure the under sides of the thighs are supported with blocks.
2. Pain in the knees. Make sure the under sides of the thighs are supported with blocks. Place a rolled blanket between each leg and block to support each knee.
3. Pain in the lower back. Due to extension in the lumbar spine. Place a second bolster under the spine.

Variations:

1. Arms extended overhead. Clasp the elbows to extend the humerus bones from the armpits.
2. Seated onto the bolster. Head and shoulders rest on the ground in front of the bolster. This pose deepens the action in the lower back. Used only with students with flexible lumbar spines.
3. No supports. This variation is used in Yin Yoga.
4. Four bolsters. Two under the spine. One under each arm as if you were seated in a reclining arm chair.

Support Poses:

1. Hip openers. (eg. Paschimottanasana, seated forward bend)
2. Knee joint openers. (eg. Janu Sirsasana, head to knee pose)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this asana if you have lower backache.
2. Avoid this pose if you have poor bladder control.

Counter Poses:

1. Forward bends.

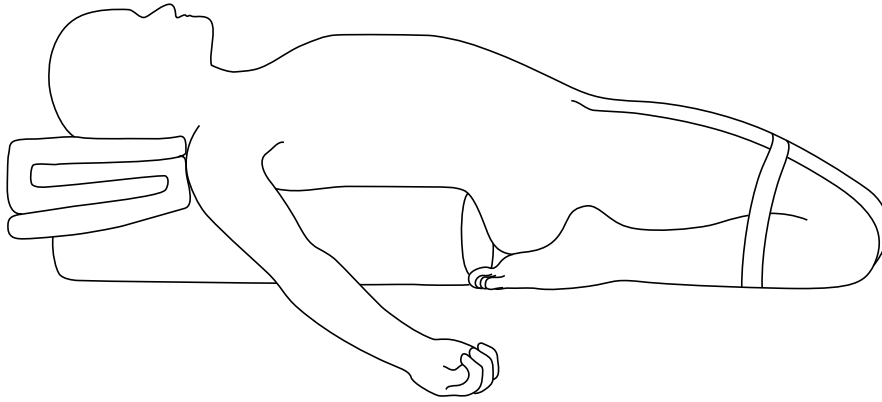
Practice Script:

From seated at the foot of your mat. Make a large loop with a strap. Place it around your pelvis and ankles. Make sure the strap is below your hip bones and tighten the strap securely and comfortably so it holds your body in position. Lie back slowly, placing the spine onto a bolster. Place a folded blanket under the head if you find your chin is lifting away from your chest. Relax the arms away from your torso, turning the palms up to help relax the shoulders. Stay for several long and deep breaths, ensuring an opening across the front of the chest. Exhale, turn the palms down and slide the hands close to the hips.

Reminders

1. Let your forehead relax and feel the skin descend towards the tip of your nose.
2. Relax your neck muscles and feel the natural curve that the spine makes and the support that the props offer your spine.
3. Remember to breathe smoothly and feel the breath as it enters the back around the kidneys and lumbar spine.

SUPTA VIRASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Supta Virasana	Reclined Hero Pose	Reclined Pose
	Supta – Reclined	
	Vira - Hero	

Benefits:

1. Supports cardiopulmonary function.
2. Supports immune/lymphatic system.
3. Relieves indigestion.
4. Tones the pelvic organs.
5. Relieves pain in the legs and feet, alleviating the effects of long hours of standing.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Spread the toes and soles of the feet to allow for the weight of the pelvis to sink between the shins. Shoulders relax down and allow the upper body to rest on its support.
2. *Primary movement:* Flexion in both knees. Slight extension in the lumbar spine.
3. *Breath:* Exhale to move into the pose. Inhale to lift out of the pose.

Secondary principles:

1. Press your knees into the floor.
2. Lift the lower abdomen in towards the spine.
3. Keep you knees together or the same distance as your hip joints.
4. Keep your thighs together.
5. Let your ribs lift and open wide.
6. Let your arms relax heavy to the floor and the shoulders moving away from the head.
7. Keep the neck long.
8. Relax your facial muscles.
9. Keep the eyes relaxed into the sockets.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the lower back. Usually caused by tighten in the lumbar spine and tight quadriceps. Place a second bolster under the spine. Or use a chair if the pose needs to come higher.
2. Pain in the knees. Due to knee injury or strain. Roll a blanket and place it under the knees. If the pain is too difficult try Supta Baddha Konasana instead.

Variations:

1. Seated. If the strain is too much on the lower body have them sit upright.
2. With no supports.
3. Arms extended overhead. Clasp the elbows to align the arm bones.
4. With four blocks. One under the pelvis. Two under the kidneys. One under the head.
5. With two blocks. One under the heart. One under the head.
6. With the feet under the pelvis. Can or cannot use props.

Support Poses:

1. Back Bends. (Supta Baddha Padmasana, reclined bound angle pose.)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this asana if you have lower backache.
2. Practice supervised if you are recovering from angina, or blocked arteries.

Counter Poses:

1. Forward Bends.

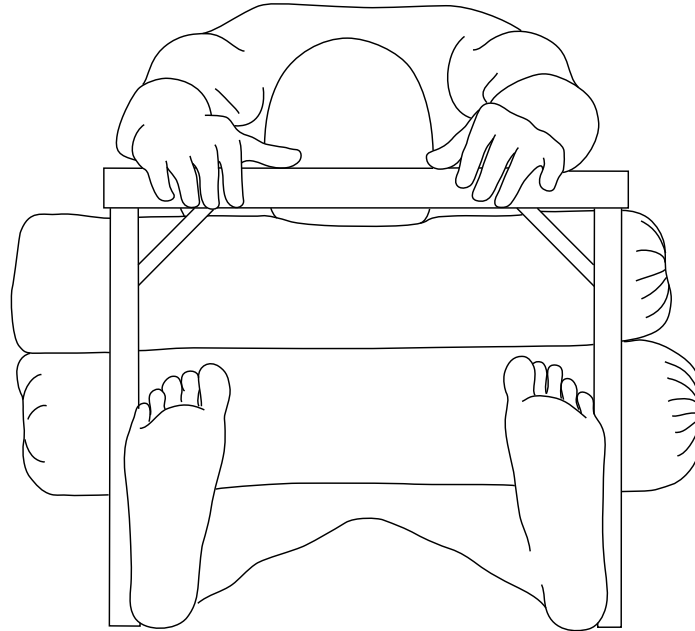
Practice Script:

Kneel onto your shins. Lift your pelvis and open your feet slightly wider than your hips. Separate your calf muscles down the middle with your thumbs and sit down onto a block. Make sure you have no knee pain before proceeding. If you do, place another block under your hips. Inhale, lift your tailbone towards the backs of your knees and lay your spine back onto your support. Make sure the neck is long. The forehead should be slightly higher than the chin. Stay relaxed with deep breathing. Otherwise, make changes so you can rest comfortably into the pose. To lift out slide your hands onto the soles of your feet. Inhale, lift the chin towards your chest and the spine back to seated.

Reminders:

1. Ensure that your shoulders are not strained in this pose.
2. Breathe evenly front to back.
3. Try to feel weight in your knees and allow the groins to widen across the hips.

PASCHIMOTTANASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Paschimottanasana	Intense West Stretch Pose	Seated Pose
	Paschim – West	
	Ut – Intense	
	Tan - Stretch	

Benefits

1. Supports sympathetic nervous system.
2. Relieves fatigue.
3. Supports cardiac function and normalizes blood pressure.
4. Relieves headaches, migraine and eye strain.
5. Reduces stress in facial muscles.
6. Alleviates stress in throat and diaphragm.

7. Improves blood circulation in the pelvic region.
8. Supports endocrine system.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Spinal support is established through the weight of the legs and shoulders. Activate the thigh muscles and hollow the groins to ground the femurs. Shoulder loop engages to pull down the shoulder blades and open the back. Chin draws down towards the chest, lengthening the neck.
2. *Primary movement:* Flexion in both of the hips. Flexion in the lumbar spine.
3. *Breath:* Inhalation lengthen the spine. Exhalation to move into the pose. Inhale to lift the spine out of the pose.

Secondary principles:

1. Watch for alignment of the ankle, knee and hip joints.
2. Quadriceps should be lifted towards the groins and groins pulling back into the hip sockets.
3. Pelvis remains neutral even if the hips are flexed.
4. Engage the shoulder loop so the shoulders and the upper trapezius muscles do not rise towards the ears. Arms can be supported overhead on a chair or bolster. Students with longer hamstrings can place their hands onto the floor.
5. Widen the space between the shoulder blades so that the lower ribs do not move too far forwards.
6. Eyes remain soft with the gaze towards the centre of the sternum.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the lower back. Usually caused by too much flexion in the thoracic spine. Lift the support under the head higher to create more of a reach in the spine
2. Pain in the back of the legs or knees. Students with tight hamstrings or lower backs will find it difficult to extend the legs to arch the lumbar spine. Have them first sit onto a support, and/or have them gently bend the knees and place a bolster or rolled blanket under the thighs.

Variations:

1. Seated onto a chair with a bolster on the legs.
2. For students with open hamstrings place their heels onto a block for a deeper stretch in the backs of the legs.
3. Standing. Uttanasana with blocks under the head and hands.
4. With a partner. Start back to back. Have one lie back into a backbend while the other lays forward into Paschimottanasana. Switch roles.
5. Konasana. Wide legged version.

6. Baddha Konasana. Keep the feet away from the hips. This version is excellent for students with tight hamstrings.
7. Viparita Karani. Legs up the wall. Also a good version for students with tight hamstrings.
8. Navasana, boat pose, with a strap around the chest and feet
9. Dandasana, staff pose, for students with stiff legs and hips.

Support Poses:

1. Forward bends that stretch the hamstrings and open the hips. (eg. Uttanasana, standing forward bend)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this asana if you have asthma or bronchitis.
2. Do not practice if you have cervical spondylosis.

Counter Poses:

1. Back Bends. (Supta Virasana, reclined hero pose)

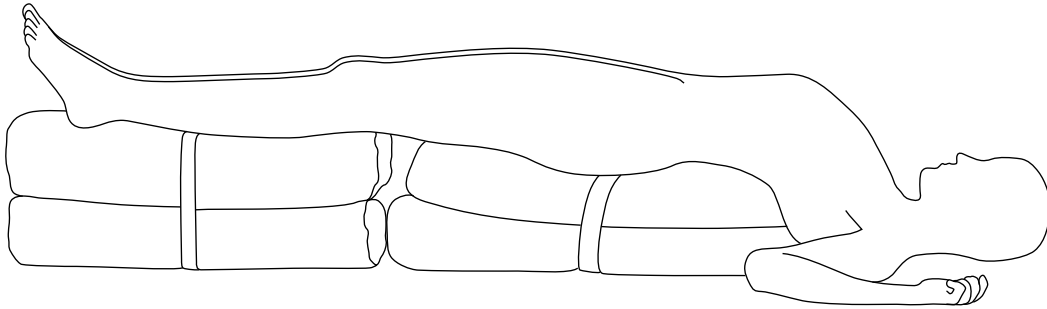
Practice Script:

Sit on the floor with your legs extended out in front. Inhale, reach and lengthen your spine. Exhale, fold deep at the hip crease. Place your head and elbows onto your support. Let your toes gently move back towards your head and feel your groins opening in the direction of the floor. Draw the lower abdomen in and back to your spine and allow the weight of your spine to release towards your legs. Let your shoulders relax down and back. Rest your forehead down evenly and try to relax the muscles of your face. Exhale, place your hands on the floor under your shoulders. Inhale, push down into the floor to lift your spine softly to seated.

Reminders:

1. Be aware of tension in your jaw or throat. Let the corners of your mouth relax.
2. Be attentive of your breath in front and in back.
3. Remember to keep the body supple so that the breath can move freely.
4. Let the eyes remain soft so that tension does not build in the neck and head.
5. Remain patient and try to feel the breath move towards the head.
6. Keep the space between the shoulder blades broad.

SETU BANDASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Setu Bandasana	Supported Bridge Pose	Back Bend
	Setu – Bridge	
	Bandha - Formation	

Benefits:

1. Supports cardiopulmonary function.
2. Relieves eye or ear ailments, migraine, stress-related headaches, nervous exhaustion, and insomnia.
3. Improves digestion and strengthens abdominal organs.
4. Relieves backache, strengthens spine and relieves neck strain.
5. Helps rest tired legs and encourages venous return.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Turn the thigh bones towards centre and draw the fronts of the legs towards the hips. Allow the arms to relax down with the shoulders.
2. *Primary Movement:* Extension in the lumbar spine. Flexion in the cervical spine.
3. *Breath:* Exhale to move into the pose. Inhale to come out of the pose back to a seated position.

Secondary Principles:

1. Spread the soles of the feet and the toes.
2. Point the toes to the ceiling and keep a slight separation of the heels.
3. Lift the shin bones towards the knees and push them firmly into the support.
4. Draw the femurs towards the hips and push them firmly towards the floor.

5. Let the groins widen across the hips.
6. Keep the lower back wide and the tailbone long.
7. Let the abdomen relax back towards the spine.
8. Let the ribcage open and allow the chest to lift.
9. Keep the palms facing up and the front of the shoulders relaxed.
10. Spread the collarbones and feel the shoulder blades lifting in towards the front.
11. Relax your throat back.
12. Keep the neck soft so the spine stays long.
13. Relax the facial muscles.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the lower back. Caused by too much compression in the lumbar spine. Lower the support under the pelvis. In severe cases roll up a blanket or two and use instead of a bolster.
2. Pain in the neck or shoulders. Generally caused by shoulder joint instability and or compression in the cervical spine. Place a blanket under the shoulders to lengthen the neck.
3. Hyper extension in the neck. Place a folded blanket under the head.

Variations:

1. Use two blocks. One under the heels and the other under the sacrum. Use a strap around the thighs.
2. Lay the back on the floor. Place a support, either block(s) or a bolster under the pelvis. With this variation keep the knees bent and the feet on the floor.
3. Place two bolsters in a cross position. Bottom one is horizontal with the mat top one is vertical. Lay the spine onto the top bolster. Drap the arms above the head.
4. Use a long bench instead of bolsters.
5. Viparita Dandasana (inverted staff pose) with two chairs. This is a deep backbend with one chair under the feet and the other under the lumbar spine. Place the head onto a support. Strap the thighs together so the femurs move inwards.

Support Poses:

1. Shoulder openers. Gomukhasana (cow pose)
2. Back Bends. Supta Baddha Konasana (reclined bound angle pose)

Contraindications:

1. If you are recovering from a major illness practice this pose supported with bolsters instead of hard blocks or benches.

Counter Poses:

1. Matsyasana (supported with a bolster under the spine and a strap around the legs in half lotus.)

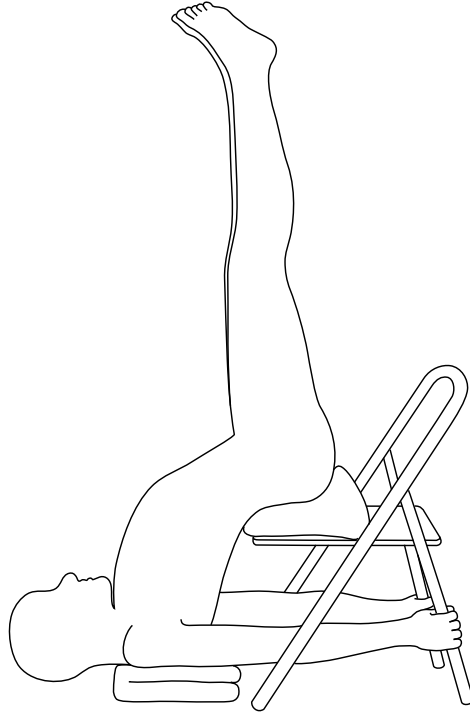
Practice Script:

With a secure strap around your upper thighs, lay your spine onto your bolsters slowly. Have your feet rest neutral against the wall. Make sure you feel supported under your shoulders to allow for your neck to rest. Keep your palms facing the ceiling as you feel the weight of your shoulders draw down to the floor. Let your eyes relax in the direction of your chest allowing for the chin to move into the chin lock. Feel the breath move into the upper chest and the neck reach away from the back. Let the weight of your thighs fall heavy into the support, as you feel the lower spine move towards the centre of the body. Exhale, turn your palms down and slide your hands back. Inhale, push down into your

Reminders

1. Let your forehead relax to feel the calming effects of this pose.
2. Continually stretch into the legs and arms to allow for more blood to flow and circulate to your joints.
3. Sense your feet articulating, bringing a new sense of vitality to tired feet.

SALAMBA SARVANGASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Salamba Sarvangasana	Shoulderstand	Inversion
	Salamba – Supported	
	Sarvanga – All limbs	

Benefits:

1. Relieves stress and nervous disorders.
2. Alleviates hypertension and insomnia.
3. Improves functioning of thyroid and parathyroid glands.
4. Relieves back and shoulder pain.
5. Supports respiratory system.
6. Prevents varicose veins.
7. Alleviates ulcers, colitis, and chronic constipation.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Shoulder loop activates putting pressure down into the floor so the chest elevates away from the floor. Legs reach up as femurs push away from the head to take more pressure off the cervical spine.
2. *Primary Movement:* Flexion in the cervical spine. Extension in the legs. Hyper extension in the lumbar spine.
3. *Breath:* Exhale to lay back. Inhale into the full pose. Inhale to lift the chin to the chest. Exhale to lift back to seated.

Secondary Principles:

1. Big toes touch. Heels separate slightly.
2. Reach up through the ankles. Draw the inner ankles towards one another if the ankles are collapsing out.
3. Draw the knees in.
4. Rotate the front thighs in.
5. Draw the quadriceps towards the groins.
6. Pull the groins back and let the lumbar spine arch.
7. Relax the sacrum onto the support of the chair.
8. Draw the tailbone in.
9. Draw the lower belly towards the spine.
10. Move the thoracic spine towards the front ribs.
11. Lift the sternum from the floor.
12. Widen and lift the collarbones.
13. Draw the shoulder blades down the back and forward towards the chest.
14. Rest the eyes down the nose.
15. Add the chin lock.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the lower back. Caused by tightness in the lower back and/or pressure from the chair. Raise the support under the shoulders and ensure there is a blanket over the edge of the chair under the back.
2. Pain the neck, head or shoulders. Either caused from injury or misplacement of the neck on the support. Make sure the neck is arching over the side of the bolster so that the shoulders are landing directly down onto the centre of the bolster. Otherwise have them come down and do Viparita Karani instead.

Variations:

1. Use the support of the wall instead of using a chair. Make sure the shoulders are supported with props.
2. Place the pelvis onto a block instead of a chair. Shoulders can rest onto a blanket but not a bolster.

- Put two bolsters in a T shape a foot away from the wall. Lay the shoulders at the top and the spine away from the wall. Lift into shoulder stand so the shoulders are still supported by a bolster. Take the feet to the wall. Tuck the toes under so you can push against the wall to extend the legs. Knees can also bend so that the shins can rest on the wall for a variation on Karnapidasana.

Support Poses:

- Inversions. (eg. Sirsasana, headstand)
- Backbends. (eg. Setu Bandhasana)

Contraindications:

- Do not practice this asana if you have a stress related headache.
- Do not practice during menstruation.
- Make sure you are not compressing the neck as it might cause injury.

Counter Poses:

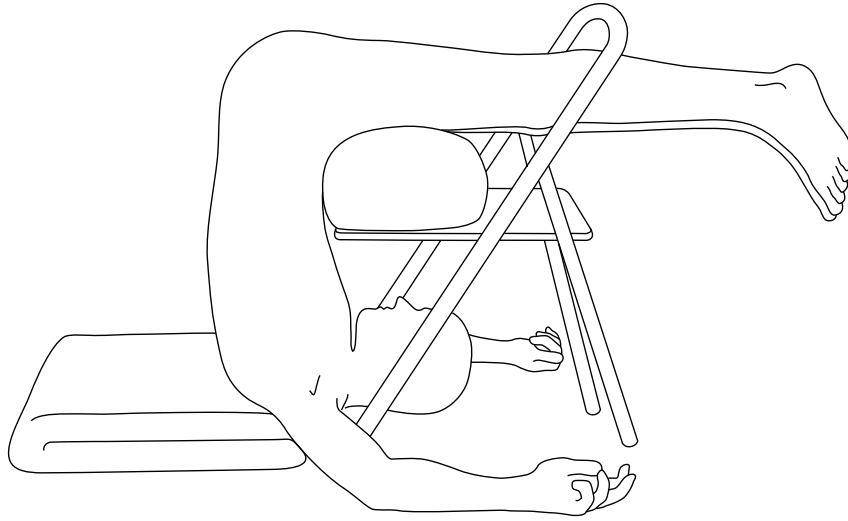
- Matsyasana (fish pose)

Practice script: From seated onto a chair swing the legs over the back seat of the chair. Grab hold with both your hands and slowly lay the spine back, eventually taking the shoulders to the bolster. Place your feet onto the bar of the chair to position your shoulders correctly onto the bolster. Take the arms along the inside of the legs of the chair to reach and take hold of the chair. Extend the legs directly towards the ceiling. Arch the lower back and hollow back the groins. Take a deep inhale and feel the chest rising. Exhale, place the feet back onto the top bar. Release the arms and take hold of the outside of the chair. Bend the knees over the top bar. Inhale, pull the chin towards the chest.

Reminders

- Keep your eyes relaxed down the length of the nose.
- Feel your chin drawing back without tensing the jaw.

HALASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Halasana	Plough Pose	Inversion
	Hala - Plough	

Benefits:

1. Reduces fatigue, insomnia and anxiety.
2. Relieves stress-related headaches, migraine, and hypertension.
3. Supports pulmonary functions.
4. Supports endocrine and lymphatic function.
5. Relieves backache and spinal tension.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Shoulder loop activates putting pressure down into the floor so the chest elevates away from the floor. Femurs push away from the floor to take more pressure off the cervical spine.
2. *Primary Movement:* Flexion in the cervical and lumbar spine and hips.
3. *Breath:* Inhale to lift the legs. Exhale to move into the final pose. Exhale to release from the pose.

Secondary Principles:

1. Big toes touch. Heels separate slightly.
2. Reach out through the ankles and toes. Draw the inner ankles towards one another if the ankles are collapsing out.
3. Draw the knees in.
4. Rotate the front thighs in.
5. Draw the quadriceps towards the groins.
6. Pull the groins back and let the lumbar spine lift.
7. Relax the legs onto the support of the chair.
8. Lengthen the tailbone in.
9. Draw the lower belly towards the spine.
10. Move the thoracic spine towards the front ribs.
11. Lift the sternum from the floor.
12. Widen and lift the collarbones.
13. Draw the shoulder blades forward towards the chest.
14. Rest the eyes down the nose.
15. Add the chin lock.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the lower back. Caused by tightness in the lower back and/or hamstrings. Raise the support under the shoulders and if necessary the support under the legs as well.
2. Pain the neck, head or shoulders. Either caused from injury or misplacement of the neck on the support. Make sure the neck is arching over the side of the bolster so that the shoulders are landing directly down onto the centre of the bolster. Otherwise have them come down and do Viparita Karani instead.

Variations:

1. Can be done on the floor without the support of the chairs. This variation requires flexible hamstrings. Make sure the shoulders are still supported by a bolster. If the feet do not touch the floor either use the wall or place a support under the toes.

Support Poses:

1. Inversions. (eg. Sirsasana, headstand)
2. Backbends. (eg. Setu Bandhasana)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this asana if you have a stress related headache.
2. Do not practice during menstruation.
3. Do not practice this pose if you have blocked arteries or cervical spondylosis.

4. If you suffer from osteoarthritis of the hips, backache, peptic ulcers, or pre-menstrual stress, or if you are overweight, separate your legs in the final posture.
5. If you feel choked or heavy headed in this pose separate your legs.

Counter Poses:

I. Matsyasana (fish pose)

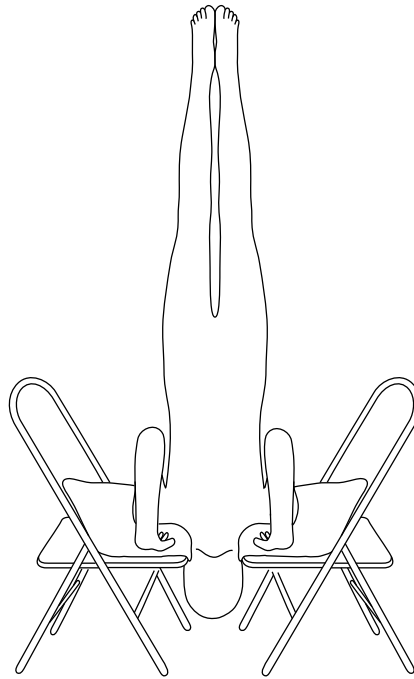
Practice Script:

From Sarvangasana, exhale, taking your feet down to the floor or onto a chair. Move your pubic bone away from your sternum, lengthening the front of your torso. Keep your torso perpendicular to the floor, elongating the spine vertically as much as possible, stretching up through your sit bones. Exhale, deepen the fold at your groins, extending your sit bones toward your heels and keeping the abdominal organs soft. Inhale, expand your sternum vertically and horizontally. Keep your waist long. Draw the front of your thighs into your femur bones, lifting the thighs through the back of your legs toward the ceiling. Lift your shoulder blades toward your pelvis and draw them into your back to help open your chest. Your base (shoulders, arms, and elbows) moves down and everything else lifts up. To exit: exhale slowly, placing your arms on the floor overhead and rolling out slowly. Keep the front of your spine as long as possible as you lower your feet to the floor.

Reminders

1. Keep your eyes relaxed down the length of the nose.
2. Feel your chin drawing back without tensing the jaw.
3. Remember to breathe deeply into the pose. Keep the breathe calm.

SIRSASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Sirsasana	Headstand Sirsa - Head	Inversion

Benefits:

1. Supports cardiopulmonary system.
2. Supports immune system.
3. Reduces the occurrence of heart palpitations.
4. Improves the function of the pituitary and pineal glands, and encourages overall endocrine support.
5. Relieves the symptoms of colds, coughs and tonsillitis.
6. Brings relief from digestive and eliminatory problems, when practiced in conjunction with Salamba Sarvangasana (shoulderstand).

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Push the hands firmly into the chairs so the weight is evenly distributed on the shoulder girdle. Hug the muscles of the legs towards the bones so the lower body balances directly over the support of the upper body.
2. *Primary Movement:* Extension in the shoulders and legs. Flexion in the elbows and wrists.
3. *Breath:* Inhale to prepare the base. Exhale to take the weight onto the head. Inhale into the pose. Exhale to release from the pose.

Secondary Principles:

1. Ensure that the elbows are not collapsing in or out but rather stay inline with the wrist and shoulder joints.
2. Press the thumb and index fingers down to help keep the arms inline.
3. Draw the humerus bones towards the shoulder joints and let them rotate externally without it affecting the stability in the forearms.
4. Keep the shoulders parallel to each other.
5. Widen the scapulae from the spine and draw them in towards the chest.
6. Widen across the top of the collarbones as the outer armpits draw towards the sternum.
7. Keep the navel, with the lower ribcage, drawing in towards the spine as the tailbone lengthens away from the head.
8. Keep the abdomen soft yet draw it into the spine.
9. Keep your thighs, knees and big toes together.
10. Stretch the backs of your knees and thighs.

Common Obstacles:

1. Pain in the neck, shoulders, head or collarbones. Generally caused either by cervical spine injury or excessive compression. Make sure there are supports under the shoulders to cushion the weight. Also avoid rolling to the front of the collarbones by reaching the legs directly up. Use the support of the wall if the legs are too weak.
2. Weight waivers unevenly. Check how the weight is distributed between the elbows, head and hands. Make sure the student is reaching into the thoracic area of the torso.

Variations:

1. Use two straps and one block in conjunction with the chairs. Place the block between the thighs with a strap around the block to ensure its position. Place a second strap around the ankles to keep the legs from separating.
2. Instead of keeping the hands onto the chair, interlace the fingers and place the forearms onto the chairs.

Support Poses:

1. Tadasana. (eg. mountain pose)

2. Salamba Sarvangasana. (eg. shoulderstand)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this pose if you have high blood pressure, cervical spondylosis, a cardiac condition, a backache, headache, or migraine.
2. Do not practice during menstruation.

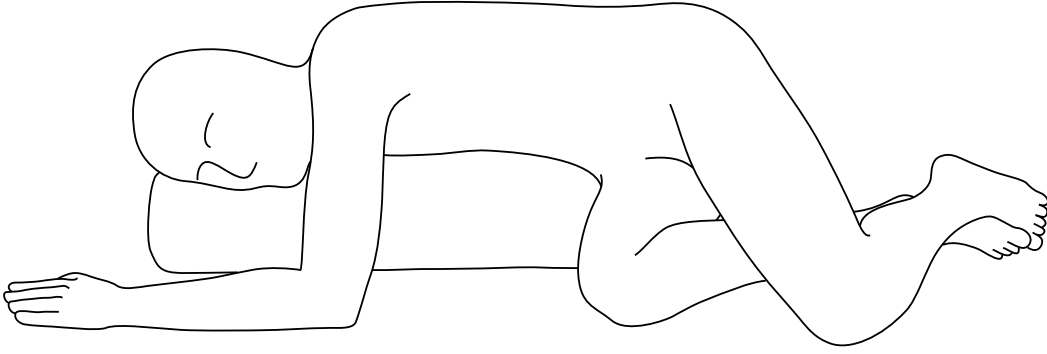
Counter Poses:

1. Forward bend (eg. child's pose)

Reminders

1. Find a quiet spine, yet stable legs.
2. Let your eyes be soft and focus on finding the breath in order to stabilize the pose.

ADHO MUKHA BHARADVAJASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Adho Mukha Bharadvajasana	Adho Mukha - Downward facing	Reclined Twist
	Bharadvaja's Pose	
	Bharadvaja - A legendary sage	

Benefits:

1. Eases pain in the neck, shoulders and back.
2. Helps to keep spine and shoulders supple.
3. Increases flexibility of back and hips.
4. Encourages release of respiratory diaphragm.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Spinal support is established through the downward release of the pelvis, spine and shoulders.
2. *Primary movement:* Flexion in both the hips, knees and elbows. Extension in the shoulders. Rotation in the spine.
3. *Breath:* Inhalation to lengthen the spine. Exhalation to move into the pose. Inhale to lift out of the pose.

Secondary principles:

1. Rest back onto the sitting bones and bottom of the tailbone.
2. Permit the outer shoulders to fall back to avoid hunching the shoulders forwards and collapsing in the chest.
3. Keep the abdomen soft so the lower back does not harden.
4. Keep the facial muscles soft.
5. Soften in the neck muscles to allow the spine to twist more easily.

Common Obstacles:

1. Strain in the neck, head and shoulders. Keep the eyes down. Lengthen the sides of the neck. Relax the shoulders away from the ears. Keep the head turned in the same direction as the knees.

Variations:

1. Seated with the hands onto supports to aid in the twisting action of the pose.
2. With the wall. Place the hands on the wall to aid in the twisting action of the pose.
3. Seated onto a chair. Grab hold of the top bar of the chair to aid in the twisting action of the pose.

Support Poses:

1. Reclined or passive twists
2. Dandasana (staff pose)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice this pose if you have a cardiac condition, high or low blood pressure, eye strain, a stress-related headache, migraine, a cold or congestion, chronic fatigue syndrome, depression, insomnia, or osteoarthritis of the knees.
2. Avoid during menstruation.

Counter Poses:

Forward bends (eg. Paschimottanasana (seated forward bend))

Practice Script:

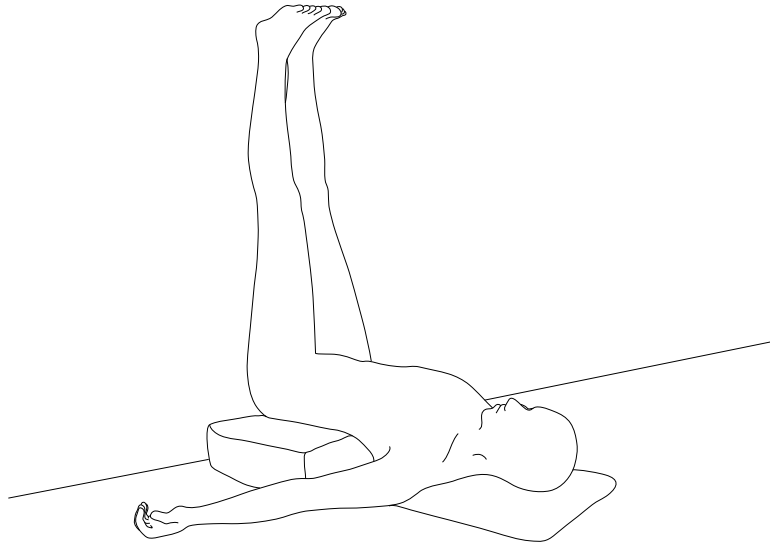
As in all twists, the twisting action of Bharadvajasana begins in your pelvis, from your pubic bone, and moves upward. Inhale, lift your chest toward the ceiling from the top of your sternum, lengthening the front of the torso as much as possible. Exhale, twisting to the right, pressing your right shin into floor to help lift the torso. Inhale, extend your right hand back, placing it on bolster or floor and lengthen your spine upwards. Exhale, twist spine slightly more to the right, using the support of your left hand. Release both sit bones to the floor or support as equally as you can. Draw your shoulders back and downward, while allowing the inner shoulder blades to move deep into your back. Avoid the natural tendency in all twists to raise the shoulder that is twisting back. Turn your head as a natural action of spiraling your spine, not as its own independent action.

Reminders:

1. Lengthen into the sides of your waist .

2. Remember to expand your chest while resting.
3. Relax the muscles of your neck.

VIPARITA KARANI



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Viparita Karani	Inverted Lake Pose Viparita - Inverted Karani - Action	Inversion

Benefits:

1. Regulates blood pressure.
2. Helps ease ear and eye tension, stress-related headaches, and migraines.
3. Supports respiratory system.
4. Relieves indigestion, diarrhea, and nausea.
5. Supports kidney/adrenal function.
6. Encourages venous return.

Primary Principles:

1. *Foundation:* Release the weight of the pelvis and legs into the support. Let the shoulders widen and lift the chest.
2. *Primary Movement:* Flexion in both of the hips and cervical spine.
3. *Breath:* Inhale to lay down. Exhale to place the legs up the wall. Inhale to place the support under the pelvis. Exhale to release into the final pose. Inhale to lift the support out. Exhale to bend the knees and roll up to seated.

Secondary Principles:

1. Keep the feet hip width apart so the heels line up with the hip joints.
2. Keep the feet relaxed and drawing back to the groins.
3. Keep the groins released towards the back of the pelvis.
4. Let the sacrum relax and widen.
5. Allow the tailbone to lengthen.
6. Allow the ribs to move from the breathe.
7. Allow the sternum to lift.
8. Keep the eyes relaxed towards the torso.
9. Keep the facial muscles relaxed.
10. Keep the neck relaxed.
11. Rest the palms facing up.
12. Keep the arms below the shoulder joints.

Common Obstacles:

1. Bend in the backs of the legs. Usually caused by tight hamstrings. Take the pelvis further away from the wall so the legs can extend. In severe cases place the knees onto a chair with rolled blankets under the knees and ankles.
2. Pain in the neck, head or shoulders. Generally caused from either shoulder or cervical spine injury. Place a rolled blanket under the neck. Make sure the head is supported by the floor. In severe cases you can place a folded blanket under the head to lengthen the cervical spine.

Variations:

1. Place a strap around the legs.
2. Place a block between the thighs, a strap around the block and a second strap around the ankles or toes.
3. Legs separate for an intense hip stretch.
4. Knees bend and the ankles cross for a deeper hip release.
5. Arms extend overhead to create upper body stability. A softer option would be to grab the elbows and relax them onto the floor.
6. With no support under the pelvis. This is a good variation for female students who are menstruating.
7. With a block instead of a bolster. This variation is more active.

Support Poses:

1. Forward bends. (eg. paschimottanasana, seated forward bend)
2. Supported Inversions. (eg. salamba sarvangasana, shoulderstand)

Contraindications:

1. Do not practice during menstruation.

Counter Poses:

Savasana. (Corpse Pose)

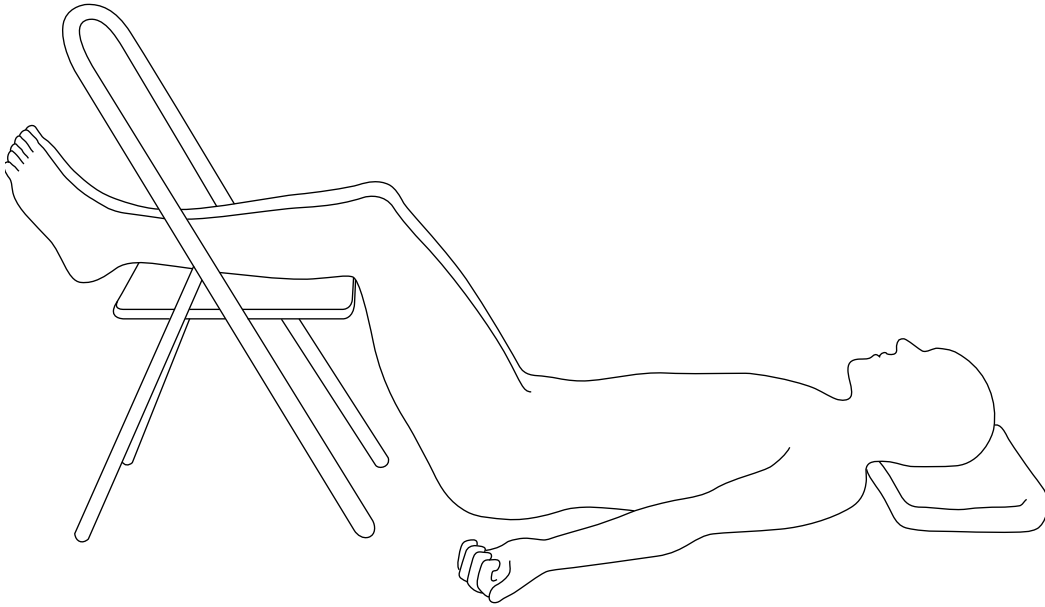
Practice Script:

With your upper thighs firmly strapped, sit perpendicular to the wall, taking your pelvis as close to the wall as possible. Lie back, rolling onto your back, extending your legs up the wall. Bend your knees deeply towards your chest as you press your feet firmly into the wall and lift your pelvis up. Slide your support under the sacrum and extend your legs up the wall. To exit, reverse this process, bending knees, pressing feet into the wall and removing the support. Roll onto your right side and relax.

Reminders:

1. Keep your head and neck passive to feel a deep release in the skull.

SAVASANA



Sanskrit	English	Classification
Savasana	Corpse Pose Sava - Corpse	Reclined Pose

Benefits:

1. Relieves physical and mental fatigue.
2. Supports parasympathetic (rest-and-relaxation) response.
3. Regulates blood pressure.
4. Relieves migraine and stress-related headaches.
5. Supports respiratory system.
6. Speeds recuperation after illness.
7. Relieves insomnia and other sleep disorders.

Principles:

1. Keep your eyes closed. Cover the eyes with an eye pillow or Iyengar bandage if there is eye, head or neck tension.
2. Release the weight of the bones into the floor, especially the thighbones, spine and shoulders.
3. Soften all muscle letting the thighbones roll out and the arms and palms face the ceiling.
4. Keep the spine supported with a bolster.
5. Feel that both sides of the torso are the same length.

6. Place a support under the head if the forehead is below the chin.
7. Lengthen the neck and soften the throat back.
8. Part the teeth slightly and let the tongue move to the roof of the month.
9. Let your diaphragm be free of tension.
10. Let your chin be perpendicular with the floor.
11. Keep your abdomen soft.
12. Relax your facial muscles and your jaw.
13. Let your eyes relax back into the skull.
14. Let your breath be natural and free of tension. Do not impose any breath patterns.

Common Obstacles:

1. Hip or lower back tension. Place a bolster under the thighs. Severe cases you could put the shins onto a chair with a rolled blanket under the ankles.
2. Neck or shoulder discomfort. Place a blanket under the head.

Variations:

1. Place a chair under the calves and ensure knees are at 90-degrees to hips. Natural lumbar curve should remain (ie. no lordosis in lower back). This is excellent for lower back pain.
2. Lay onto two bolsters. Place two more bolsters on either side and rest the arms onto each bolster. Make sure there is a support under the head so the neck stays long.
3. With a block and bolster, place the bolster above the head and the block on the bolster and your forehead. This is helpful for cervical neck tension or headaches.
4. With a partner, have one person lay in Savasana while the other places a bolster on their partner's thighs. Then they lay over the bolster with the torso and rest the forehead on two blocks.

Support Poses:

1. Any reclined poses (eg Supta Baddha Konasana, reclined bound angle or Supta Virasana, reclined hero)
2. Meditation. This is an introductory asana for meditation and when the upper body is supported for Pranayama (breathing) practice.

Contraindications:

1. If you are pregnant, have a respiratory ailment, or experience anxiety, support your upper body with a bolster under your chest and head.
2. In later stages of pregnancy, the upper body should always be raised, so either lay with a bolster under the thighs and a blanket under the head, or lie on the side with a bolster between the thighs.
3. Practice this pose only at the end of your practice.
4. If you are using a headwrap, practice the first 10 times with it wrapped around your forehead and not your eyes.

Practice Script:

With a chair close to your hips, lay on your side, knees bending towards your chest. Lay on your back as you gently swing your legs to the chair seat, placing your calves on the seat of a chair. Make sure that your knees and hips are at approx. 90-degrees, maintaining natural lumbar curve. Take a slow and smooth inhale: exhale opening your mouth to release the breath out like a sigh. Follow that sensation of letting go, relaxing the weight of your bones and softening all your muscles. Let your eyes relax back into your head as your eyelids soften and close. Release your jaw completely and feel your throat letting go. Watch your breath: smooth, steady and calm. Notice, as you rest in this pose, the movement of your breath is a reflection of the thoughts that are moving in your mind. To exit: draw your knees to your chest, roll onto your right side and rest there for a few breaths before using your left hand to push up to a seated pose.

Reminders

1. Practice equanimity. Notice all things happening in the moment as an arising and falling of thoughts, emotions, sensation –without being “carried away” by any of them.
2. Remind yourself to keep your breathing natural. Let go of excess tension without forcing in any way.
3. Keep your mind attentive and focused on breath and sensation; this is not about falling asleep. We practice wakeful awareness.

RECOMMENDED READING

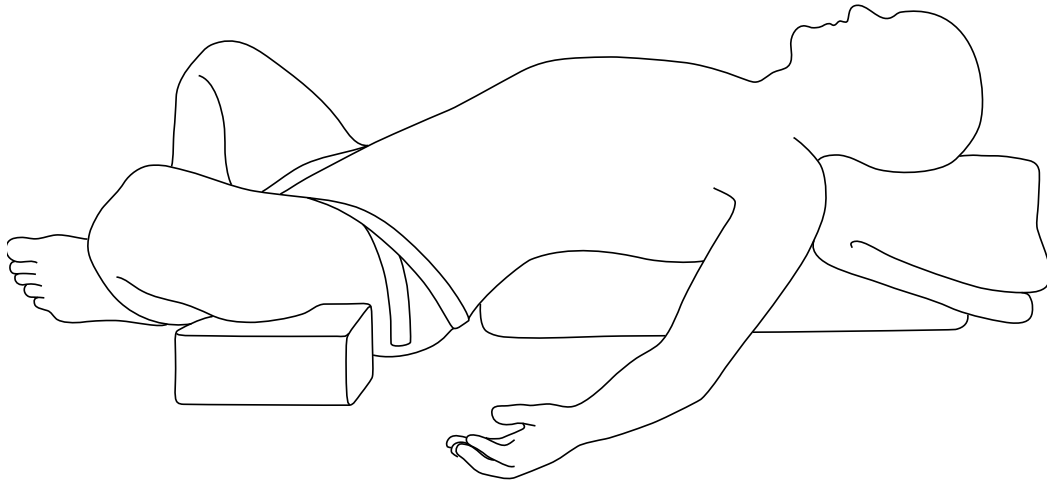
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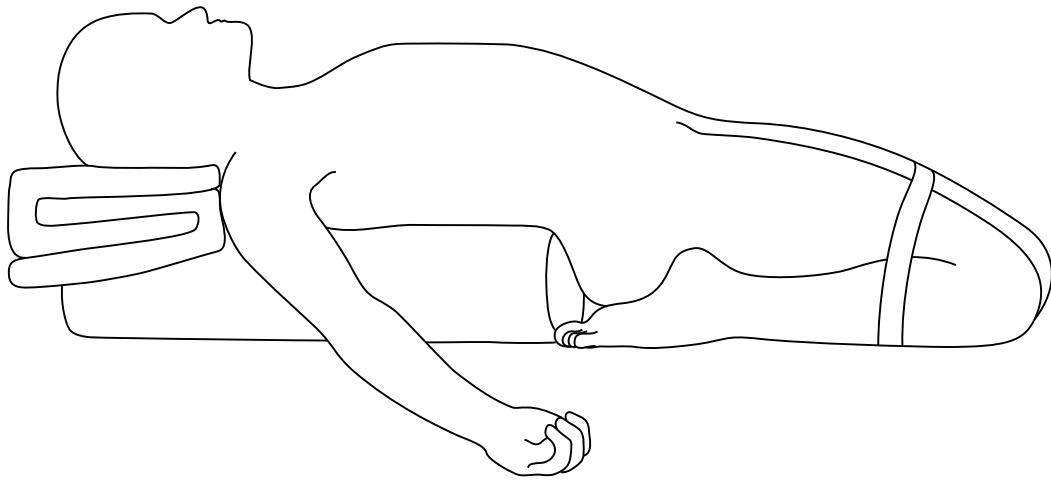
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SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA



SUPTA VIRASANA



SIRSASANA

