

Exercises & Yoga Postures for Health

by

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EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

[By the practice of yogasanas] "the important endocrine system is controlled and regularized so that the correct quantities of the different hormones are secreted from all the glands in the body... The muscles and bones, nervous, glandular, respiratory, excretory and circulatory systems are coordinated so that they help one another. Asanas make the body flexible and able to adjust itself easily to changes of environment. The digestive functions are stimulated ... The sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are brought into a state of balance so that the internal organs they control are neither overactive nor underactive... asanas maintain the physical body at optimum condition and encourage an unhealthy body to become healthy."

– Swami Satyananda Saraswati

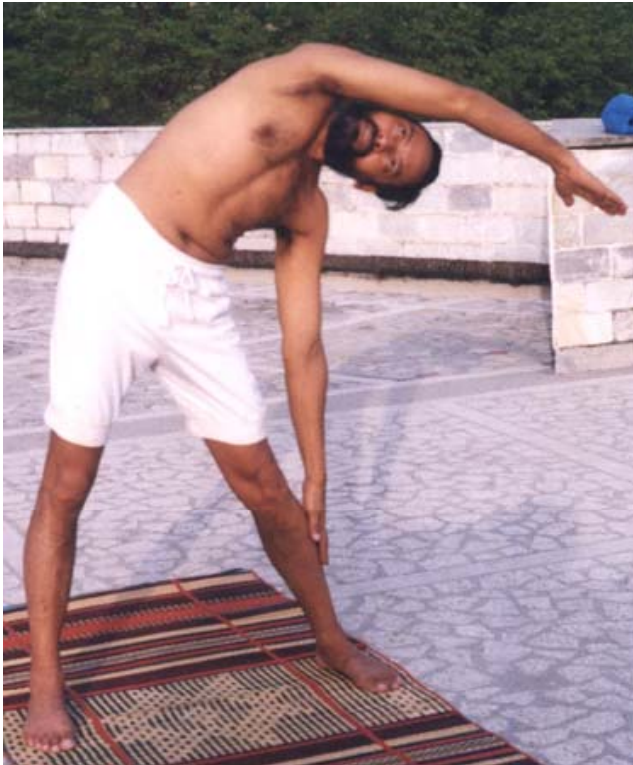
EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Introductory Notes About Asanas

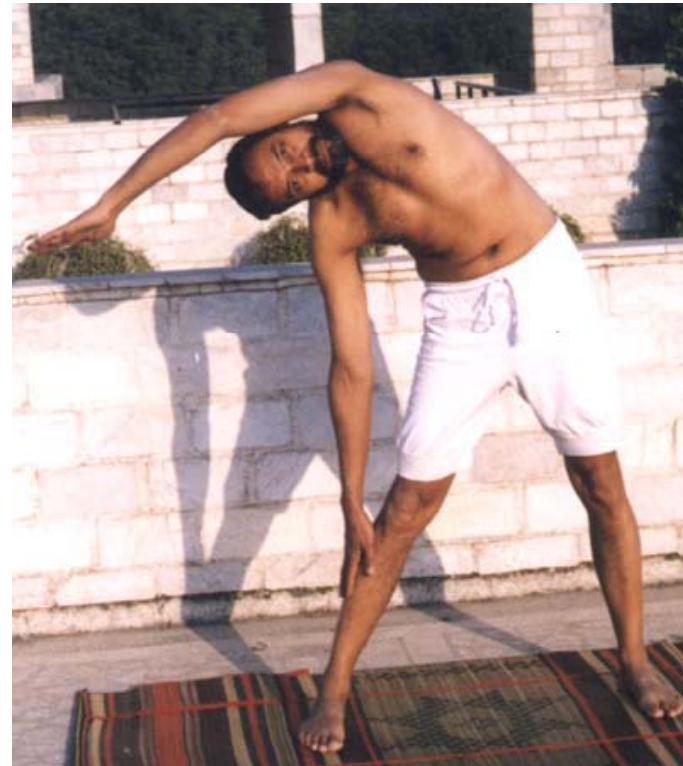
1. Prior to practising asanas, a cool shower and a vigorous rub with a coarse towel helps the body to become supple by improving the blood circulation. But do not shower or bathe for 30 minutes *after asanas*.
2. Mornings are preferable for asanas. It is also easier to maintain regularity in the mornings, for myriad activities later in the day may create time crunch and lead to irregularity.
3. Let following times elapse before undertaking practice of asanas: 4 hours after full meal, 1 1/2 hour after snack, 1 hour after beverage.
4. At least half an hour gap between asanas and vigorous exercise.
5. Sequence of asanas: Begin with standing asanas or surya namaskar and end with sirsasana (headstand). Since savasana is mandatory after sirsasana, this will also save time.
6. Individuals suffering from any ailment, should seek expert advice before attempting asanas.
7. It may be not be possible initially to attain to the complete posture. Try for a gradual improvement. Asanas should be practised with a smooth flowing motion and not with sudden jerks. Do not overdo.
8. Once proficiency has been achieved, alternate day practice generally bestows nearly the same benefits as daily practice.
9. Any number of books and instructions on yogasanas are available today. This sequence of asanas was found to be more suitable by the author. It should be emphasized, however, that other sets and sequences of asanas may be equally beneficial.

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Side stretch & contraction



Stand with feet about 2 feet (2/3 of a meter) apart. Raise right hand and bend left with left hand sliding down. For 10-15 seconds



Stand with feet about 2 feet (2/3 of a meter) apart. Raise left hand and bend right with right hand sliding down. For 10-15 seconds

Benefit : Vertebral column becomes limber

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Surya Namaskar 1-3 of 12 positions



1. Stand facing east with heels and palms joined together. Eyes closed. Visualize the golden rays of the sun entering your body circulating warmth and life-force.



2. Palms facing outwards, fingers joined together and with left thumb over the right thumb, stretch hands upwards and backwards arching the back.



3. Slowly bring hands forward and downward. Touch fingers to the ground and then place palms on the ground next to your toes, and touch forehead to the knees.

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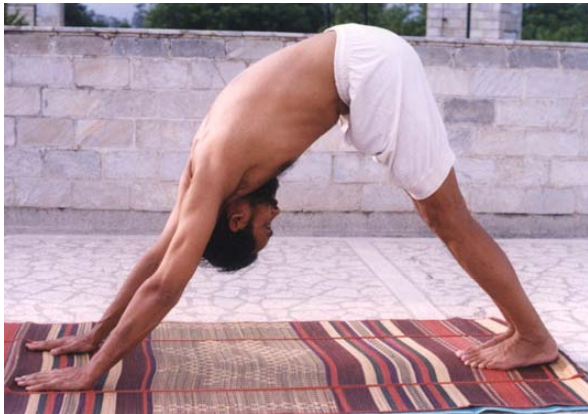


Surya Namaskar 4-7 of 12 positions



4. Keeping left foot between the palms on the ground bend left knee and stretch right leg backwards touching the right toes and knee to the ground. Arching the back, look up.

5. Stretch left foot backward and balancing body weight on the toes and the palms, arch the back and look up.



6. Keeping palms at their position, place soles of feet flat on the ground and raise hips so that the body forms two sides of a triangle with ground as the third side.



7. Slide feet backward. Touch the nose tip and chest to the ground. Support the weight of the body on palms placed next to the shoulders, and the toes.

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8. Lower the body to the ground. Raise the torso up pressing the palms in front thereby arching the back, and look up.



10. Bring left foot forward to join with the right, stand with palms on the ground and forehead touching the knees. This posture is the same as 3.

Surya
Namaskar
8-11 of
12 positions



9. Bring right foot forward, place the sole between the palms with leg bent at the knee, look up. The posture is similar to 4. except now the right foot is between the palms.



11. Raise hands, and with palms facing outwards, fingers joined together and with left thumb over the right thumb, stretch hands upwards and backwards arching the back. The posture is the same as in 2.

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Surya Namaskar 12 of 12 positions



12. Bring hands forward joining the palms at the chest. Close the eyes. Visualize the golden rays of the sun entering your body, circulating warmth and life-force within. The posture is the same as in 1.

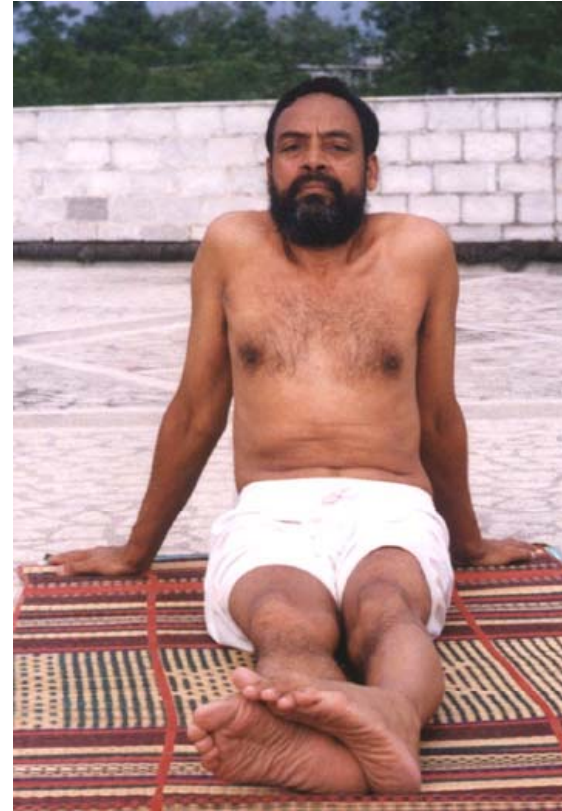
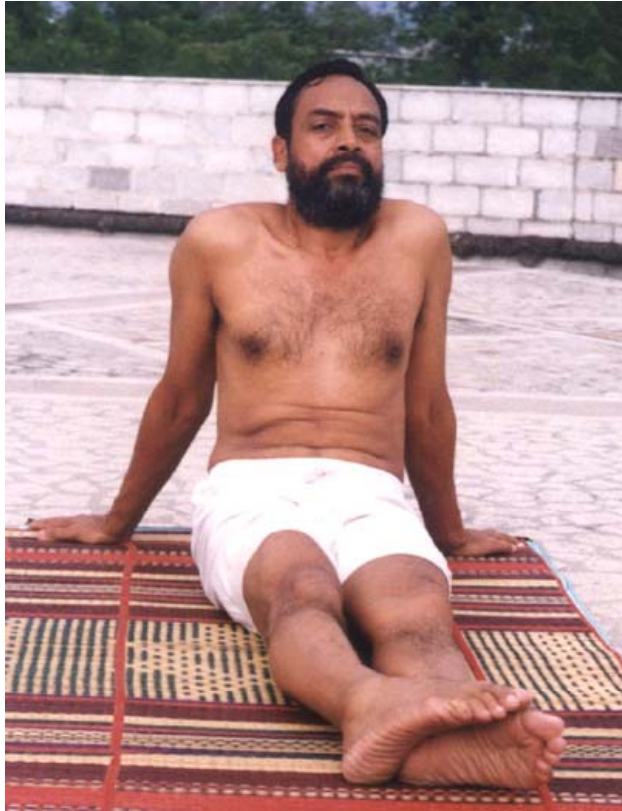
Relax in savasana (see later).

Benefits: Rated as one of the best yogic exercises, surya namaskar tones up the entire body. It broadens the chest, increases the capacity of the lungs, relieves constipation, stimulates digestion, bestows health & sharp intellect and increases the suppleness. As body becomes limber, practice of other postures becomes easier.

Hint: Should you be short of time on the day of asanas, practice surya namaskar for 5-10 minutes as a substitute .

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Ankles' strength & suppleness



Sit with legs stretched in front. Palms on the sides near the hips to provide balance and support. Keep thighs, knees and calves on the ground. Feet touching together. Rotate both feet at the ankles 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise.

Benefits: Strengthens the muscles of the ankle and provides flexibility to the ankle joint. People prone to ankle sprain will derive much benefit from this exercise.

EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Knee & Ankles' strength & suppleness



Sit with legs stretched in front. Keep thighs, knees and calves on the ground. Feet touching together. Now bend the right leg at the knee and place your palms with interlaced fingers under the knee. Press the right thigh to the abdomen and touch your chin to the right knee. Strive to bring right heel closer to the hip. Left leg is stretched out in front with toes pointing away from the body. Hold for 15 counts.

Reverse the positions of the legs. Stretch the right leg in front and stretch toes away from you. Bend the left knee, place interlaced fingers under the knee and press the left thigh to the abdomen. Touch your chin to the left knee. Strive to bring left heel closer to the hip. Hold for 15 counts.

Benefits: Good posture for strengthening the knee and ankle joints. Pressure of the thigh on the abdomen helps remove excessive gas.

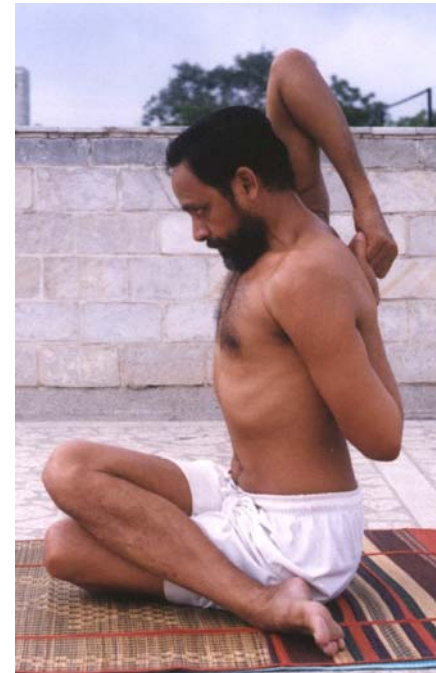
EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Gaumukhasana

Sit with outstretched legs. Fold left leg at the knee and place the sole next to right hip. Now fold right leg at the knee, place right knee above the left and the right sole next to the left hip. Raise and bend the right hand so that the elbow points upward. Bend left hand with elbow pointing toward the ground and interlock fingers of both hands behind your back. Press your chin to the base of the throat to form the chin-lock (see figure). Hold for 15 counts.

Reverse. Fold right leg at the knee and place the sole next to left hip. Now fold left leg at the knee, place left knee above the right and the right sole next to the left hip. Raise and bend the left hand so that the elbow points upward. Bend right hand with elbow pointing to the ground and interlock fingers of both hands behind your back. Press your chin to the base of the throat to form the chin-lock (see figure). Hold for 15 counts.

Benefits: Very beneficial in enhancing lung volume and cleansing of the lungs. Muscles of legs and hands get strengthened. Chin-lock helps in stimulating the thyroid gland responsible for general health.



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Gorakshasana

Sit with legs outstretched. Fold legs at the knee. Grab feet with hands and place the soles of the feet against each other. Bring the heels close to the body. While holding feet, flap the knees up and down like the wings of a bird 15 times. Then strive to touch the knees to the ground on either side, form the chin-lock by pressing the chin to the base of the throat, look upward and hold for 15 counts.

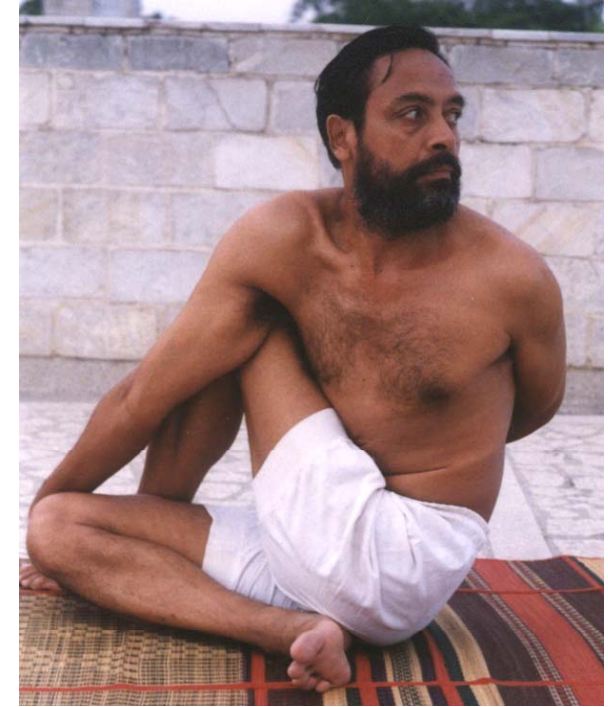
Benefits: The posture is very useful for the lower body. Chin lock stimulates the thyroid. Highly effective in imparting suppleness to the joints of the knee, ankle, and the pelvic region. Experts recommend this asana for urinary disorders and prostate problems.



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Ardha Matsyendrasana



Sit with legs outstretched. Fold left leg at the knee and place the foot next to right hip. Now fold right leg and place the sole of the right foot next to left knee. Right knee points upwards. Catch hold of right foot with left hand keeping the left arm to the right of the right knee. The chin touches the left shoulder and right hand is placed on the left knee.

Now twist the body at the waist to the right and strive to place right hand fingers on the left thigh from behind. The head is also twisted to the right at the neck. Hold for 15 counts.

Back to starting position. Reverse. Fold right leg at the knee and place the foot next to left hip. Now fold left leg and place the sole of the left foot next to right knee. Left knee points upwards. Catch hold of the left foot with right hand keeping the right arm to to the left of the left knee. The chin touches the right shoulder and left palm is placed on the right knee.

Now remove the left hand and twist the body at the waist to the left and strive to place left hand fingers on the right thigh from behind. The head is also twisted to the left at the neck. Hold for 15 counts.

Benefits: Keeps the spinal column supple and wards off old age. Helps reduce fat on the waist. Stimulates gastric secretions. Recommended in cases of diabetes because it stimulates the pancreas. Muscles of the back and the neck get exercised.

EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Vajrasana

Sit with legs stretched in front. Fold the legs at the knee and sit on the inverted soles. Big toes touch each other. Place palms on the thighs.

Benefits: Strengthens thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet and toes. Relieves fatigue of legs from running or walking. Very helpful in digestion if practised after meals. Relieves constipation. Also serves as a basic posture for other asanas or pranayama, e.g. for modified matsyasana, yogamudra, kapaalbhaati, meditation, etc.



In a variation of Vajrasana, feet are placed to the sides and one sits on the buttocks rather than on the soles of the feet.

The variation accentuates pressure on the knees and ankles.

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Janusirasana



Sit with legs outstretched in front. Fold left leg at the knee and place the heel below the scrotum. Grab hold of the big toe of the right foot and bending forward touch forehead to right knee. Place elbows on the ground and strive to keep right knee flush to the ground. Hold for 15 counts.

Back to outstretched legs posture. Now fold the right leg at the knee and place the heel below the scrotum. Grab hold of the big toe of the left foot and bending forward touch forehead to left knee. Place elbows on the ground and strive to keep the left knee flush to the ground. Hold for 15 counts.

Benefits: Improves blood circulation. Helps reduce fat from the waist and makes the body supple. Helps remove bad odours of the body.

EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Ardha-chakrasana

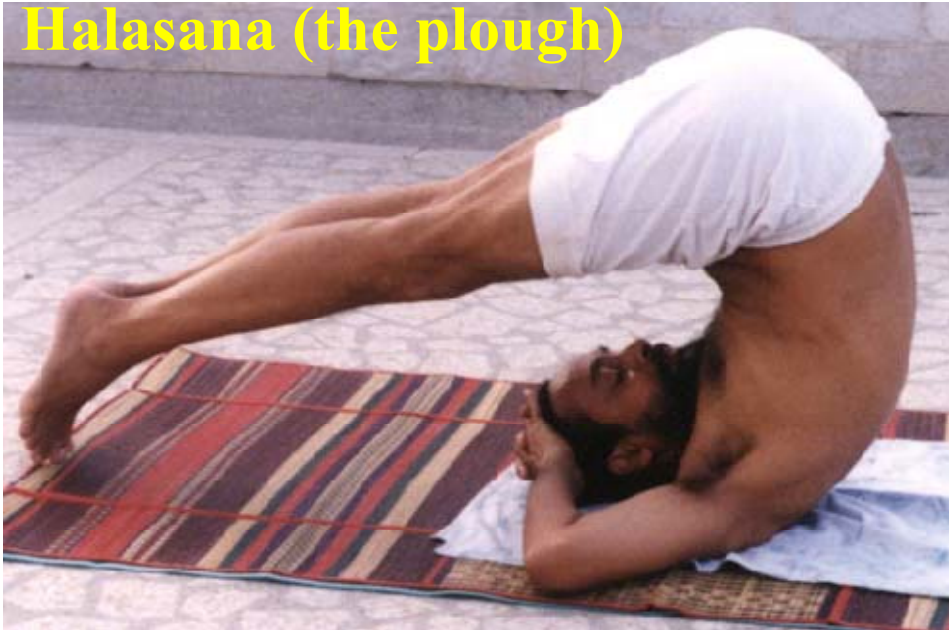
Lie on the back. Fold legs at the knee and place feet about a foot apart close to the hips. Now place palms on the ground near the shoulders with fingers pointing towards the feet. Raise the body with weight balanced on the palms and the soles of the feet or toes. Push the abdomen upward. Hold for 25 counts. Lower the body slowly to the ground. Relax in savasana.



Benefits: Elasticity of the spine ensures good health and vitality. This asana is very helpful in a delayed onset of old age. For it prevents the stiffening of the spine and keeps the nerves toned up. It also exercises all parts including shoulders, chest, waist, thighs and legs thus enhancing suppleness and agility of the body.

EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Halasana (the plough)



Lie down on the back. Hands to the sides. Raise both legs six inches above the ground. Hold for 3 counts. Raise the legs farther up to 45° and hold for 3 counts. Raise the legs farther up to 90° (perpendicular to the ground), and hold again for 3 counts. Now lower the legs behind your head and without bending the knees touch the ground with the toes. Interlace fingers and place palms on the head. Press the chin to the base of the throat and strive to move the toes as far back as possible. Hold for 15 counts.

Benefits: Makes the spine supple, removes excessive gas, improves circulation, helps remove fat from the hips and waist. By stimulation of the thyroid overall health is maintained. Beneficial for the liver, spleen, thyroid and stomach. Also alleviates lethargy.

Karnapeedasana



From halasana, lower the knees to the ground next to the ears. Calves are stretched behind the head and the soles of the feet face upward. Grab forearms behind the thighs. Hold for 15 counts.

Benefits: As the name suggests, this asana is especially beneficial to the ears. The spine becomes more flexible, flatulence is removed, and thyroid gets stimulated.

Sarvangasana

From karnapedasana raise the legs straight up with palms supporting the middle back on both sides and pushing the torso so as to form the chin-lock. Make the torso and the legs perpendicular to the ground. Look at the toes, or alternately close the eyes and concentrate on the thyroid located at the base of the throat where the chin presses. Hold for 15 counts. Slowly bring the torso and legs back to the ground. Relax in savasana.

Matsyasana (next) is a complementary posture and should follow halasana and sarvangasana.

Benefits: By reversing the direction, sarvangasana provides a richer supply of blood to the eyes, ears, the face, the thyroid and parathyroid glands. Strengthens shoulders and the neck muscles and alleviates the disorders of constipation, dyspepsia and varicose veins. Helps reduce fat from the waist and strengthens the back. Delays onset of aging.



EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH

Matsyasana



Matsyasana variation



Sit in padmasana by placing right foot over the left thigh and the left foot over the right thigh. Taking support of the elbows, lower the torso and the head to the ground. While raising the torso off the ground support the weight on top of the head and the elbows. Grab the big toes between the index finger and the thumb.

Variation: If padmasana is not possible, do as follows. Lie down on your back. Keeping the hips and legs on the ground, raise the back off the ground and balance the weight on top of the head so that the chin is facing up. Interlace your fingers and place the palms beyond your head.

Benefits: The spine becomes supple, and constipation is relieved. Ears and throat benefit. Recommended as a prophylactic against the development of pulmonary ailments. Very beneficial for the anatomy of women.

EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH



Padmasana

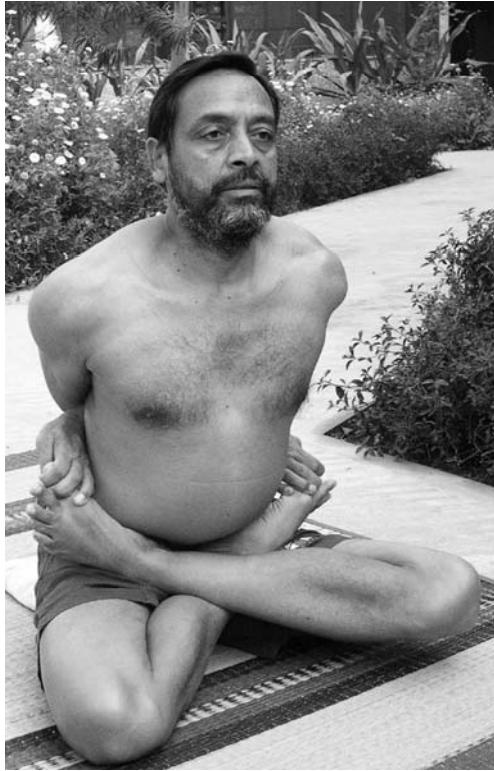


Sit with legs outstretched. Place the right foot over the left thigh with the heel near the navel. Now place the left foot over the right thigh so that both heels are near each other. Knees are on the ground. Palms may be placed on the knees, or alternately next to the navel with right palm over the left. Keep head, neck and torso erect. Look straight in front. For meditation close the eyes.

If you are unable to assume this posture, try the following. Sit with legs outstretched. Now place the right foot over the left thigh with heel near the navel. Strive to touch and keep the right knee on the ground. Do it for 5 minutes. Interchange the position legs. With right leg outstretched, place the left foot over the right thigh with heel next to navel. Strive to touch and keep the right knee on the ground and hold for 5 minutes. You may wish to practise this initial loosening up of the legs sitting on a mat or carpet while engaged in other activities such as conversation with friends or family, or watching TV. After some weeks it should be possible to gradually sit in padmasana.

Benefits: Relieves indigestion, constipation, flatulence. Thighs, calves, knees and ankles become supple and strong. By providing a firm triangular base the body can stay without movement for 15 - 30 minutes or even more with practice. Padmasana is presumably the best posture for keeping the body motionless and thereby a great aid for concentration.

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Badhapadmasana



Sit in padmasana posture (see above) by placing the right foot over the left thigh and the left foot over the right thigh. Take the left hand behind the back and catch hold of the big left toe. Now take the right hand behind and catch hold of the big right toe. Sit straight with head, neck and torso erect. Look straight in front. On different days the sequence of the legs should be alternated, i.e. first place the left foot on the right thigh, etc.

Benefits: It is even better than padmasana in relieving disorders of the abdomen including indigestion and hernia and therefore should be practised as a prophylactic. Beneficial for the liver. It has a particularly toning effect on female organs.

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Yoga Mudra



From baddhapadmasana bend the body at the waist and touch the forehead to the ground. Hold for 30 counts.

Benefits: For the abdominal organs, this asana has more of a salutary effect than even the baddhapadmasana. Thighs, calves, knees and ankles become supple. The working of the kundalini power is facilitated.

Variation: If baddhapadmasana is not possible, yogamudra can be practised in vajrasana. Fold the legs at the knee and sit on heels while big toes touch each other. Bend the torso and head forward and touch the forehead to the ground. Catch hold of the left wrist with right hand behind the back and hold for 30 counts.

Sirsasana

EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH



Sirsasana (Head stand)

Place a folded sheet or towel on the mat at the place where you will stand on the head.

Sit on your toes with thighs extended in front. The place to do headstand on is the juncture of forehead and hairline.

Place upper forehead on the folded sheet with interlaced fingers and palms supporting the back of the head and the elbows on the ground forming a triangular base. Straighten legs with only toes on the ground (see picture).

Now begin walking on the toes towards the head. As the torso becomes perpendicular to the mat, the feet will be lifted off the ground. Fold the legs at the knees balancing the body on the triangular base of upper forehead, forearms and elbows (fig.).

The next step should be done only when you become stable and comfortable with the preceding position. It may take several days. Once you feel secure in balancing your body, raise the legs slowly and finally stretch the toes up (fig.).

Increase the time of this asana only gradually. The first time do not exceed 15 seconds. Add 15 seconds every fourth day until you reach 3 minutes. If you do sirsasana as part of a regimen, then more than 3 minutes are generally not recommended.

After the practice of the asana, reverse the steps. Slowly come back to the beginning position.

Contd.

Sirsasana EXERCISES & YOGA POSTURES FOR HEALTH



To preclude sudden draining of blood from the brain, close fists, place the left fist over the right and rest forehead on top of the left fist (picture). After a minute relax in savasana for at least half the time you did the posture of sirsasana.

Benefits: Circulation to the upper parts of the body including throat, ears, eyes, head, brain improves. Many of the more important

ductless glands are situated above the heart, e.g. thyroid, pituitary, pineal. Sirsasana provides a tonic effect to them as well as the whole body. Skin and hair benefit. This asana is a boon to people who do much mental work. It enhances memory. Proper functioning of the Lymphatic System is crucial for fighting disease and eliminating waste and debris from the body. Movement of the lymph is tremendously helped by all inverted postures, for lymph flow is not pushed by any pump. Sirsasana is the ultimate inverted posture.

Variations may be practised for applying pressure to the abdominal area resulting in additional toning benefit to the organs located therein and to develop extra sense of physical and mental balance. A couple variations of sirsasana are shown in figures to the left. They may be practised only when you feel completely sure of your balance.

In the first variation, the legs are folded at the knee to form the padmasana.

In the second variation, keeping the balance knees are lowered towards the elbows to the extent manageable.

To return from these postures, slowly unfold the left leg and raise it up. Join the right leg to the left to get back into normal sirsasana.



Lie flat on your back, head in a comfortable position. Touch big toes, and let feet fall to the sides with knees relaxed. Extend arms fully and rest them lightly with the hands about 6 inches away from the thighs. Palms turned upwards and fingers slightly curled. Do not clench teeth, eyes closed. Lie perfectly still.

Relax tissues and body parts as a squeezed sponge resumes its form. Move your awareness from the feet upwards. Relax your toes, feet, ankle, calves, knees, thighs, hips and the lower back. Relax the upper back, shoulders, neck and the back of the head. Relax the top of the head, and the forehead. Do not frown. Relax eyes, cheeks, lips, jaws, and the chin. Relax the throat, arms, elbows, forearms, wrists, palms and fingers. Relax the chest, ribs, the abdomen, and the navel area.

Imagine the golden rays of the sun filtering through a lush green tree. When you breathe in, imagine rays entering the body and making it golden. When you breathe out, imagine all your fatigue, ailments, stiffness and pain leaving your body as black smoke.

After the savasana (5 to 10 minutes), turn your body to the left side and slowly get up.

Benefits: Relieves fatigue as nothing else does. All tension of the nerves, muscles, and bones is removed. The body is completely relaxed and metabolism slows down relaxing the internal organs as well. Recommended for people with hypertension and heart trouble. People with insomnia may benefit by its practice at night.

Aspiration

विश्वं पुष्टं ग्रामे अस्मिन्ननातुरम् । ।

– *Yajurveda* 16:48

In this village [global village], may all
sentient beings be robust and healthy