

Adho Mukha Svanasana

(Downward-Facing Dog)

Benefits

- Calms the mind
- Helps relieve stress and fatigue
- Energizes the whole body
- Increases shoulder flexibility
- Lengthens and strengthens the spine
- Helps relieve back pain



Contraindications/Cautions

Pregnancy: Do not do this pose late-term
High blood pressure or headache
Eye problems

When people are first learning about yoga, they often imagine this posture as the quintessential pose, for good reason, too. This posture is an excellent overall rejuvenator for the body. It awakens the senses, getting the nighttime and/or fatigue out of the muscles and joints. Anyone who has seen a dog or cat stretch after awakening from a nap is familiar with the basic posture. It is a posture that is practiced by beginner to advanced yogis and yoginis, for its benefits are immeasurable! Ready?

1. Lay face down hands next to your armpit/ chest, feet hip width apart toes curled under. Come up onto your hands and knees.
2. Take your sitting bones back to your feet, without moving your hands. Begin preparation for this posture by focusing on your hands. Middle finger forward. Fingers spread. Keep your arms straight and strong. Relax your head, which frees up your neck muscles. Once you have established the work in the arms, you are ready to come up into the posture.
3. Without letting your head or shoulders move forward, lift your knees, then your sitting bones. ONLY then do you work to straighten the legs. Depending on your hamstring flexibility you may or may not be able to straighten the legs. If you can't now, that is okay! Yoga is about INTENTION. All that is required is YOUR EFFORT.

4. Press the thumb side of the hand into your mat, working the arms. Pull the shoulders up and back. This action lengthens the spine. Try to imagine your breastbone is chasing your legs to the back behind you.
5. Press the heels down. Try to get them to the floor. Roll your thigh muscles in, rotating them toward each other. Draw your kneecaps up, and push your shins back into the room. This really opens up the backs of your legs.
Think of your body almost as an inverted V – don't sway your back.
6. Spread your sitting bones by lifting them up and back, toward the ceiling. This action helps open up the sacrum. This wide bone can be a source of many back-related problems. That is one of the many benefits provided by yoga through the work we do with the sacrum and spine.
7. Continue, stretching, spreading the sitting bones, working the arms, legs and feet. Try lifting the arches of your feet, and try to lift your toes off the mat. Press the heels down.
8. Hold this position actively for one minute. Do not hold your breath. Breathe!