

Utthita Parsvakonasana

(Extended side angle pose)

Benefits:

Opens and strengthens the pelvic floor.
Increases ankle strength and flexibility.
Opens chest. Improves breathing capacity.
Brings flexibility to the shoulder joints.

Contraindications/Cautions:

Femoral or inguinal hernia
Sciatica
Dizziness/Vertigo

This pose can be quite challenging, so do not worry if you are unable to move fully into the pose right away. As with all yoga postures, the benefit comes from trying. All yoga is about intention. One of the wonderful lessons available to you in yoga is learning how to be content with what you can do. Yoga is not competitive, nor is it goal-oriented. It is counterproductive to concern yourself with limitations. Yoga reflects life: the journey is more important than the destination.



1. Begin in Tadasana (mountain pose). Jump or step your feet five feet apart. With your feet facing forward, have the outer edges of the feet parallel. Raise your arms and extend them to the side, palms facing down. Keep the shoulders soft and try not to raise them up around your neck. Reach the arms out, from the center of your spine through your fingertips. Raise your torso out of your pelvis by imagining you are being pulled upward by a string attached to the top of your head. Stand tall and stand firm, feeling important - because you are important!
2. Turn the left foot in about 15 degrees. Turn the right foot out 90 degrees and line up the heel on your right foot with arch of your left foot.
3. Firm your quadriceps (thigh muscles) and concentrate on externally rotating your thighs. Your left hip should be in line with your left ankle. Don't allow the hip to swing into the room. You can better accomplish this by keeping your pelvis as square in the room as you are able. Your right knee should be looking straight out over your toes.
4. Press the outer edge of your back foot hard into the ground; inhale, and on the exhalation (keeping the inside of your knee in line with the outer edge of your big toe,) bend your right knee until the right thigh is parallel to the floor. Your right knee should be over your right ankle. If your knee goes beyond your ankle you need to take your feet further apart. Otherwise, injury could occur to the knee.
5. Take your right hand to the floor behind your right foot. Reach out through your left arm and rotate your arm so that the palm of your hand is facing the ceiling. Rotate the thumb side of the hand down and the pinkie side of the hand toward the ceiling. This helps to open up the pectoral muscle on the left side.
6. Take your left arm over your head, palm now facing down. Keeping your neck long and in line with the spine, turn your head and look up at the ceiling. The extended side of your body should be forming an angle from the side of the left foot through the tip of the middle finger of the left hand.
7. Press the outer edge of your left foot hard into the floor and roll the front of your left thigh towards the ceiling. Pull your right knee back and bring your right chest around - show your heart to the sky. This is a great twist for the torso.
8. Hold the posture for one minute. Then, keeping your left leg strong on the exhalation straighten your right leg. Bring your feet to face forward. Jump or step your feet together.
9. Repeat the posture on the other side. When you have completed both sides, mentally review what you've just done – was one side easier than the other? What seemed different between one side and the other? This questioning and reflection aids us in better understanding the asymmetry in our bodies and that reflection will help us to recognize symmetry, as we gain it.