

Man on the mat with
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Headstand: Sirsasana)

Benefits

Its not called the king of all poses for nothing. The anti-ageing benefits alone will have most yogis turning upside down in a second, but it's the other benefits, such as reversing blood flow that also make this asana 'royalty'.

To perform it well, without over exertion, it requires the recruitment of all the core muscles and a sense of alignment. This makes the headstand a great way to tone up the deep abdominals and bring awareness to where our bodies are within space.

It's a relatively advanced pose though, so be sure to learn with a qualified teacher. Develop your foundation poses and core muscles before you turn your world upside down.

Common Mistakes

Alignment is essential for a good headstand. Common mistakes can be seen in the many variations of banana shapes, bending forward at the hips like a jackknife, or tilting the entire body forward or backwards. These versions highlight that the body is not in a neutral position.

When you are aligned and straight, then your bones will support you, making the pose easy and rejuvenating. This way, your muscles will only need to work to maintain the alignment.

Its not going to be easy standing on your head if you haven't mastered standing on your feet first. Search for your midline and develop your alignment with *Tadasana* (mountain pose). Your pelvic and spinal alignment along with the activation of the muscles of the torso and legs are pretty much the same in both poses; the main difference is that one is inverted. So make progress by going back to basics.

Tone the spinal muscles in preparation with *Sarvangasana* (shoulder stand), also a great way to get used to being inverted and avoid any disorientation, or loss of balance that may come with headstand.

Downward-facing dog and plank pose are also great pre-headstand preparation.

Tips

- Practice headstand with your back one foot away from the wall (to practice shifting your weight into that neutral position without fear of falling).
- Begin with your elbows shoulder-width apart and little fingers of hand and forearms pressing firmly into the mat.
- Position your head so the crown is touching the mat and begin to walk your feet inwards, without losing the integrity of your back and shoulder alignment.
- As you exhale, connect with your deep abdominals, drawing your navel inwards towards the spine as you bend the knees to come up. Resist the temptation to simply spring the legs up or lift one foot at a time. Instead, focus on the abdominals drawing the legs up, and be sure to keep the forearms pressing down and the scapulas stabilised. This way the pose will stay balanced and controlled.
- When your headstand feels strong and effortless, you can extend the legs straight, or even play with transferring the weight with tilting movements of the pelvis.
- Stay in your headstand for as long as you can maintain the quality of the pose, without stress or over exertion.
- Spend time in *Balasana* (child's pose) after you come down.

Awareness

Being able to stay in the moment is one of the demands and rewards of headstand. Being aware and focused on balance and alignment will also require you to bring your focus inwards. Use the pose as an opportunity to centre yourself and to find an equilibrium of both body and mind. ☺

