

Adho Mukha Svanasana Downward Facing Dog



Pronounced uhd-hoe moo-kuhsh-vuhn-aah-suh-nuh the word 'mukha' means 'face' and 'shvana' means dog in Sanskrit

This pose mirrors the pose a dog takes when stretching out. It is often considered to be a rest pose but for beginner students it is very often a challenging pose at first.

Possible Staging:

1. Half dog
2. Walking the dog
3. Down dog both heels to floor
4. Development: One leg down dog (Eka Pada A-M-S) & Hip opener

Teaching Points:

Start:

- Knees to floor, feet hip width apart & hands shoulder distance apart
- Palms & fingers fully to floor, middle finger pointing forwards; use a wedge or similar if needed (can explore other options as indicated below)

Enter:

- Lifting sitting bones up and backwards
- Bending knees if needed to hinge at hips, so spine is not rounded
- If legs are straight avoid hyperextension at knees, keeping a micro-bend at knees if needed

Stay:

- Engage adductors as if internally rotating legs at hips to help draw sits bones apart
- Keep whole spine long and open, engaging abdominals to support lower back
- Can try externally rotating upper arms, spiraling outwards & internally rotating lower arm at elbow; alternatively see if an internal rotation at the shoulders is preferable.
- Chest open
- Keep neck relaxed and lengthened, unless consciously dropping chin into Jalandhara Bandha
- Do not force heels to the floor

Exit:

- Lower knees to the floor and sit on heels, moving into a suitable counterpose such as Balasana.

Note: Do not practice on a very soft surface such as a deep carpet as the angle at the wrists will become more acute placing more pressure on the wrist joint.

Benefits:

- When familiar this is a restful position, often useful as a counterpose
- Stretches spine & shoulders
- Stretches posterior leg muscles, increasing circulation in legs
- Relaxes neck muscles

- Increases strength & creates feeling of lightness
- Good preparation for arm balances and inversions

Good preparation

Mobilising shoulders and wrists, hamstring and calf stretches.
Raising awareness of anterior pelvic tilt, core muscles and adductors.

Cautions

HBP/CAD: no stay, half forward bend, practice at wall
Acid reflux/Ear, eyes, nose conditions: as above
Wrist conditions: try fists, wedge or practice at wall
Low back problems/Sciatica/Stiffness: bend knees
Pregnancy: caution, can practice at wall is necessary

Main modifications are:

- Half dog (puppy dog)
- Half forward bend (hands to support)
- Hands to a wall



Note: at the wall we can take hands higher than hip height to better reflect down dog pose.

Useful explorations

1. Shoulders: at first we externally rotate the shoulders for flexion but at the full ROM of flexion what happens if we internally rotate the shoulders, does it give more complete flexion?
2. Notice when we move the position of the hands, pointing fingers inwards or outwards, it has an immediate effect on the position of the shoulders:
 - 1) Usually middle finger points forward along long edge of mat
 - 2) Point fingers inwards: does it alleviate stress at elbow or wrists?
 - 3) Point fingers outwards, does this help to reduce hyperextension of elbows & stress at elbows and wrists, whilst increasing external rotation of the shoulders?

Adjustments

Standing in front of student between arms:

- Hand gently placed between shoulder blades, opening hand to suggest opening this area

Standing behind the student:

- Hands at hips and gently draw hips backwards
- Can use a belt wrapped around hips to draw hips backwards