

Adho Mukha Vrksasana (Downward-facing Tree or Handstand Pose)

Pronounced uhd-hoe moo-kuh vrick-shaah-suh-nuh the word adho means downward, mukha means face and vrksha is tree in Sanskrit

This is often listed as an advanced inversion because:

- it requires strong upper body strength and good balance
- when we are practicing the core muscles must be engaged which makes it more challenging to breathe
- it can easily place excessive pressure upon the carpal tunnel and the associated median nerve



When contemplating practicing this asana students may experience a certain level of anxiety, and certainly this may be the case for older students for whom this pose may not be relevant. Indeed this asana highlights how we must always consider the benefits v the risks of an asana for a group.

Note: This asana should not be performed on a soft surface like a carpet as that will allow the wrists to sink lower than the palms and fingers.

Teaching Points:

Stage one:

- At first we can practice against a wall. We place hands to the floor at shoulder distance apart, between 1 to 3 feet from the wall
- **Keep the arms straight at all times, looking at a point between the hands and the wall to keep the chest open**
- Inhale, and exhaling swing each leg up, one by one.
- Keep gazing towards the wall, keeping the neck comfortable bringing legs in line with the hips, **maintaining a neutral spine with a natural lumbar curve.**
- Press down into the ground with the hands as if lifting the toes up to the ceiling.
- **Ensure that there is no collapsing into the wrist or the heel of the hand**, this is very important.

Stage two:

- If possible experiment with lifting one foot then the other foot from the wall.

Stage three:

- Perform away from the wall
- To exit slowly lower the legs one by one to the floor

Note: The lumbar back can become overly hyperextended or arched and this needs to be counteracted by engaging the abdominal muscles, and pressing down into hands as if we are lifting upwards. Mula bandha also assists in this.

Benefits:

Strengthens the wrists, arms & shoulders

Strengthens the spinal muscles

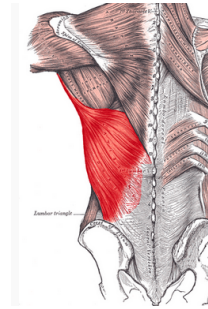
Strengthens the abdominal muscles

Frees the muscles of the chest and ribcage

Gives feeling of confidence and exuberance

Good preparation

Shoulder strengthening, arm strengthening, wrist strengthening, abdominal strengthening, flexion of arms at shoulders: i.e. release of latissimus dorsi that is attached from spinous process of T7 to L5, the iliac crest, lowest four ribs and inferior angle of scapulae to the inner top of the humerus.



Cautions:

- This pose is prohibited for:
 - For heart conditions and high blood pressure
 - For eye problems, epilepsy and headaches
 - For severe spinal degeneration in lumbar region
- For general back conditions and sciatica work very cautiously and this pose may be prohibited if it creates any sense of discomfort
- For low blood pressure be very cautious and may need to avoid
- For shoulder injury or stiffness this pose may be prohibited
- For menstruation this pose is generally best omitted for the first three days
- For bone weakness, asthma, anxiety, sinusitis take care

Alternatives:

Offer other inversions instead as appropriate and if all inversions are prohibited if necessary down dog to the wall can be taught.

Adjustments:

- We can help a student to find balance by standing to one side and placing the inner arm against the back of legs as a 'leg stop'
- To help diminish an arched spine we can place a hand between the knees or calves and ask the student to squeeze the hand and draw it as if upwards
- Do not stand behind a student!