

Bakasana (Crane pose)

Pronounced buhk-aah-suh-nuh the word baka means crane in Sanskrit.

This arm balance is called crane pose because the shape is reminiscent of the crane, the tall wading bird to be seen in river estuaries and the like.

Teaching Points:



Note: whenever practicing an arm balance such as bakasana we must ensure we are not working on a soft carpeted floor because this can mean we over-extend the wrists as the wrists sink beneath the level of the fingers. Also some students will find it helps to claw at the ground rather than keeping the hands perfectly flat.

Stage 1

- Start in a squatting position placing hands shoulder width apart, middle fingers facing forwards if possible. Let elbows be bent.
- Place the feet close together coming on to tips of toes as the knees are positioned upon the outside of the upper arms as close to the armpits as possible.
- Press the shins against the upper arms, keeping elbows tucked in against the body. Could stay here.

Stage 2

- Now very slowly bring the body weight forwards **as the chin is lifted slightly** and feet rise.
- Keep the feet touching at the inner edges and actively point the feet, let the abdomen be hollow and the back rounded.
- Balance here using the positioning of the head to help, oftentimes if we look down then all is lost so simply look up a little working as if the head and buttocks are two ends of a scale.

This is an interesting asana because there is flexion of the spine and abduction of scapulae, and it is often challenging to lift the head whilst keeping the thoracic spine flexed and the scapulae abducted. Many muscles are working through isometric contraction, meaning it is very strengthening.



Drishti point: Be aware of tip of nose

Benefits:

Strengthens the shoulder girdle, arms and wrists
Stretches the lower back
Strengthens the abdominal muscles

Develops good concentration
Promotes good balance
Instills feelings of confidence, conquering fear

Good preparation

Hip mobilisers, long term shoulder and arm strengtheners.

Cautions & possible modifications

- For carpal tunnel syndrome we can practice an alternative pose or simply place a little weight into wrists without lifting feet, staying at the first stage.

- For osteoporosis as above.
- For general stiffness and lack of strength, or conditions where the pose is challenging such as low back conditions we can practice the first stage if possible.

Simple versions and modifications

Blocks stacked beneath the forehead

A good intermediary option to assist in balance and confidence is to place a number of blocks beneath the forehead. The height of the blocks will need to be determined according to the height of the student.



Blocks stacked beneath the feet

It is possible to assist the lift by placing blocks beneath the feet although this is not ideal because it means the student does not as yet have enough strength and co-ordination to lift of their own accord so it may be better to work without them, building strength.

Developments & Variations

Extend arms

We can develop the pose by straightening arms

Extending one leg behind

We can develop this pose significantly by bending the elbows a little more and straightening one leg behind.

Moving from crane to headstand

A very good development for those who are ready is to lower from crane into headstand, perhaps returning to crane after working with headstand!

Adjustments

We need to scan the room to check the hands are being placed at shoulder width and if necessary invite students to alter their position, whilst checking that hands and wrists retain comfort. If elbows are splayed we can touch them lightly and ask students to squeeze them against the body.

This pose may lead to feelings of frustration when inaccessible so we need to explain the benefits of why we are doing this pose so that students understand that these can also be achieved in other asana such as cat balance, plank and so forth. Bakrasana, and similar poses, often provide a good opportunity for exploring the reasons why we practice asana!