

Chakrasana (Wheel pose)

Pronounced chuk-raah-suh-nuh the word chakra means wheel in Sanskrit

This asana is generally called the wheel as the shape of the pose resembles part of circle, although sometimes this asana is also called urdhva dhanurasana meaning upward bow pose. It is a challenging pose because it requires great flexibility as well as strength.



When teaching strong backbends it is very helpful to perform a series of backbends increasing the intensity little by little. So for chakrasana this would certainly be applicable!

Teaching Points:

Stage one

- Lie supine with feet hip width apart, heels close to the buttocks. Chin tucked in to chest.
- Bending elbows place the hands palms down under the shoulders, fingers pointing towards the feet.
- Keep both elbows pointing upwards and squeeze them inwards. Let the spine be long against the floor.
- [Students can stay here working to find this hand placement and drawing elbows inwards.](#)



Stage two

- If it is possible now lift the hips so there is a straight line between the knees and shoulders. Adjust the pelvic tilt to keep the lumbar region comfortable.
- Keep the knees aligned so they do not splay out to sides, if necessary placing more weight into the inner edge of the feet
- [Could stay here experiencing the stretch to the thighs and groin.](#)



Stage three

- Now to continue into the pose lift the hips higher, coming onto toes if necessary.
- Keep the abdomen pressing into the spine adjusting the pelvic tilt to keep the lumbar region comfortable.
- [Again, could stay here.](#)



Stage four

- Now pressing down into both hands lift on to the crown of the head.
- Keep the elbows tucked in towards the body, the knees aligned with the hips.
- Continue to adjust the pelvic tilt to keep the lumbar region comfortable.
- [Could stay here](#)



Stage five

- To lift into the full pose press down into hands, straightening the arms.
- Lowering heels to the floor if already working on tip toes
- Draw the shoulder blades into the back and towards the waist.
- Lifting the hips so now the pubic bone and ribs are at the same height
- Keep the neck relaxed
- Walk feet inwards the hands if possible
- Stay here opening the whole front of body experiencing the pose as one continuous curve of energy



To exit

- Bending arms and legs lower head to floor
- Tuck chin into chest and lower down to bridge pose
- Lift arms above the head and curl the spine back down to the floor
- Spend a few moments experiencing the effect of the asana and then move into a suitable counterpose.

Caution: Do not overly compress the lumbar and cervical spine. Note that some students who naturally have less flexion possible at the shoulders will need to practice with bent arms and the hands placed further behind, whilst initially this may be due to general stiffness within the shoulder joint it may also be due to structural differences where some students cannot fully flex the arm at the shoulder, meaning this is an acceptable variation. Other students will be able to place wrists beneath shoulders.

Benefits:

Opens the chest and shoulder girdle
Aids deep breathing by expanding the lungs
Can be helpful for asthmatics
Increases flexibility and strength of spine

Strengthens the wrists, arms, shoulders and legs
Lifts energy
Creates feelings of exhilaration

Good preparation

Simpler backbends and twists; chest & shoulder mobilisers; hip & groin openers; back strengtheners and mobilisers; poses developing good abdominal control and strength

Cautions

For most conditions and injuries students can simply stay at an earlier stage of the wheel or work with a suitable form of dwi pada pitham or setu bandhasana. These include:

- Shoulder and wrist conditions and injuries
- General low back ache and/or sciatica, disc conditions
- Abdominal conditions
- Un-medicated high blood pressure, heart conditions and glaucoma
- Pregnancy: cat tilt, soft camel hands to chair seat or similar

Simple versions and modifications



Spinal curl: Stay at an earlier stage of chakrasana or if necessary work with a simple spinal curl. We can in fact introduce any bridge pose that suits the ability of the student as a good modification.

Lie over an exercise ball

In the early stages an excellent option is to provide exercise balls where a student sits upon the ball then lowers the upper body backwards placing hands upon the floor. This is great to provide the experience of this backbend whilst providing support and lengthening for the spine. Care the ball does not move!

Place a belt around the upper arms

Where a student is ready to lift into the raised wheel pose a belt can initially keep the arms at shoulder width. Although students should not rely upon this in the longer term it can be used in the mid term as students become stronger.

Students to hold teachers ankles

If students hold the teachers ankles it is possible to lift into chakrasana from there and the teacher can hold a belt around the upper back area gently helping to lift the hips. This variation can be used when a student is at the stage of beginning to lift into the raised position. If two people are available that person can stand in front of the feet and place a belt around the buttock region.



Hands placed against two blocks/bricks positioned against a wall

If we place two blocks/bricks against the wall it is possible to place the hands upon the flat face of the block. This modification reduces the depth of the backbend and also the angle of the wrists.

Developments & Variations

One leg lift

From the main pose it is possible to place the weight into one foot and lift the other leg vertically, toes pointing to the ceiling.

Enter the pose from a standing position

This development requires great abdominal strength and control.

Adjustments

We need to take great care when adjusting for this pose so verbal instruction and perhaps using a student to demonstrate the teaching points is best. We can check if the feet are active and we can also note the alignment of the knees checking with the student that they are comfortable.

Finally if the chest has sunk beneath the shoulders then we can very gently place a hand beneath the upper back and ask the student to move away from it. It is best not to interfere physically with either the shoulders or the neck since we can inadvertently cause injury.