

Dhanurasana (Bow pose)

Pronounced dhuh-noor-aah-suh-nuh the word dhanur means bow in Sanskrit

This prone backbend is called the bow as the shape of the pose resembles that of a bow being drawn.



1) Teaching Points:

- Start in a prone pose

Stage one

- At first we can lift and lower legs only, by trying to take the sole of the raised leg to the ceiling in this way we are learning the action the legs must perform. Here we must keep the lower leg hip to the floor and avoid using this leg to aid the lift



Stage two

- Now we can lift both bent legs and the upper body simultaneously with arms along sides of the body. Some students may wish to stay working at this level.

Stage three

- If all is okay to proceed we now hold behind at the outside of the ankles and keeping legs aligned with the hips we actively lift both legs to the ceiling as we contract the abdominals and raise the sternum, externally rotating shoulders so that the emphasis is upon lengthening the whole spine. A strong active leg energy is required here.
- If it helps to maintain openness at the lower back imagine the sacrum is pressing down into the ground to maintain openness at the lower back as you extend the spine lifting upwards
- Note: we must ensure the legs are lifting directly upwards as if extending or straightening the legs whilst **engaging the adductors giving a feeling of slight internal rotation at the hips** to stabilise the pelvis, otherwise we can exert unwanted pressure into the SI joints and low back; indeed if the legs appear to splay with heels turned inwards towards one another this is a sign that we are not lifting with mechanical integrity
- Draw shoulder blades down and together opening the chest.
- Lengthen the whole spine equally avoiding compression into any particular area of the spine, keeping the neck long and open, even if chin is lifted
- Keep legs and feet active.
- Stay here using the breath to re-adjust the pose. It is possible that the movement of the breath will create a rocking movement and this is perfectly acceptable, although the intensity of the pose is increased if we stay still breathing into the chest.
- To exit simply release hands and lower the body to the floor and after feeling the effects of the pose adopt a suitable counterpose.

2) Vulnerable areas:

Do not overly compress or twist at the lumbar area; also avoid excessive compression and rotation at the bent leg knee joint.

3) Benefits:

- Stimulates and stretches the abdominal organs
- Opens chest and shoulders
- Rejuvenates the spine (stretching & strengthening)
- Strengthens the lungs
- Tonifies the sexual and reproductive organs
- Alleviate sciatica & simple backache (using softer forms)

4) Good preparation

A series of simpler backbends and twists. Chest & shoulder mobilisers. Hip & groin openers, especially hip flexor stretches and external hip openers. Back strengtheners and mobilisers. Poses developing good abdominal control and strength.

5) Cautions & possible modifications or alternatives

- Low back conditions: if necessary keep to one of the earlier stages or adopt shalabhasana (locust pose) instead
- Bony hips: place padding beneath hips
- Knee problems: ensure knees stay aligned, if necessary do not hold feet working with unbound version instead or use belts warped around ankles
- Heart conditions and high blood pressure: caution, choose softer modification if needed (there is possible pressure upon the deep blood vessels such as the vena cavae)
- Abdominal problems, recent surgery, pregnancy: work with an alternative such as vyaghrasana (tiger pose) where can keep raised leg at hip height if needed or bent at knee, toes to ceiling
- Severe spinal disc conditions: practice a soft shalabhasana (locust pose) or vyaghrasana (tiger pose)

6) Simple alternatives and modifications

Shalabhasana (locust pose)

Here we can learn to lift the leg, strengthening hamstrings and releasing hip flexors. This is a useful modification and a great preparation for bow.



Sarpasana (serpent pose)

Here we can become proficient at lifting the upper body up using muscular effort only. This is a useful modification and a great preparation for bow.



Wrap a belt around the ankles

It is possible to extend the reach of the arms by wrapping a belt around the feet, ideally if possible we will wrap one belt around each ankle. This however can easily create unbalance so care must be taken for this.

7) Variations & Developments

Keep thighs to floor

We can direct the work into the upper body by keeping the thighs to the floor.

Hold to the inside of the ankles

This alternative hand position may suit some students very well as it encourages the legs to stay at hip width rather than splaying out to sides.

One legged bow



We can move into bow where only one leg is raised. To do this the lower arm is extended along the ground in front as we take the other arm to the same side leg. We keep the torso to the ground as the rear leg is raised upwards. Note sometimes the front arm is shown as being placed across the area in front of the torso but this can have the effect of compressing

the spine so it is worth trying both possibilities. This variation requires caution because we are working the spine asymmetrically and so inner awareness is necessary to check the low back remains comfortable, and it will be unhelpful for spinal conditions.

Palms to feet

A much stronger pose can be elicited if we place the palms to the soles of the feet, pointing thumbs to big toes. This development certainly requires a much more intense external rotation of the shoulders and great flexibility with the spine.

8) Counterposes:

Flapping fish, gentle lying twist, apanasana, down dog, balasana