

Hanumanasana (Monkey pose)

Pronounced huh-noo-maahn-aah-suh-nuh the word hanuman refers to the Monkey God, the epitome of service.



This asana is named after the Hindu monkey god Hanuman who in the epic of the Ramayana helps to rescue the wife of Lord Rama by making giant leaps across the mountains. One giant leap famously was from the southern tip of India to Sri Lanka!

This asana can highlight the question of why we practice asana, and what development in asana really constitutes. It may be that we can say because it involves extreme movement at the hip joints, and potentially the spine, plus extreme flexibility is needed in the rear quadriceps and front hamstrings it must only ever be a progression for those students for whom this asana provides the edge of intensity?

Teaching Points:

Stage one

- Practice anjaneyasana, lunge pose
- Keep the front knee stacked above the ankle and ease the rear leg backwards lowering the hips whilst keeping hips squarely facing forwards; placing padding beneath rear knee if needed.
- Keep the spine lengthened, lifting out of hands, lengthening arms and if necessary come onto fingertips or blocks
- Could stay here experiencing the stretch to the hip flexors, inhaling feeling the upwards lift through arms, and opening of the chest, exhaling the hips being gently lowered.



Stage two

- As above but now lift the rear knee and gently create a straight line from the front thigh to the back foot.
- Keep hips as low as in the previous pose if possible.



Stage three

- Now bend the rear knee to the ground, using padding if needed
- Ease both hips backwards, keeping hips square, as front leg straightens, back leg becoming vertical
- Flex forwards from the hips keeping the spine lengthened; keep the torso in touch with the front thigh and wherever they separate this is the place to stay, your edge.



Stage four

- Then slide both hands backwards until wrists are beneath shoulders, and using the hands and arms as support gently slide the front leg forwards, little by little.
- Engage core muscles and keep the chest lifting upwards to lengthen the spine into a vertical position



- Keep the front leg straight, engage quadriceps and use the arms to slowly progress to your limit.
- In the full pose roll both thighs inwards or internally (to avoid over stretching the adductor muscles and placing pressure into sacroiliac joints and spine), square hips forwards and lift the ribcage away from the pelvis.
- You can then raise arms vertically if possible.

To exit

- Press hands into the floor and use arms and abdominal strength to help you lift the hips.
- Bend the front knee, returning to the lunge pose
- Sit back in child's pose before working to the other side.

Caution: We must work gently over time and stay with the preparatory stages if needed. This is a very exacting pose because the torso must be kept in neutral between two opposite actions, with all of the movement of the legs occurring at the hips. Additionally because generally hyperextension occurring at the rear leg hip is more challenging than flexing at the front leg this means the spinal column may also be drawn into hyperextension, potentially placing excessive and possibly asymmetrical pressure upon lower spinal discs. This also can lead to excessive pressure being exerted upon the hamstring attachments of the front leg so care must be taken to note that the stretch is not experienced at this point.

Note that we can see the use of eccentric contraction in this pose where muscles lengthen as they contract (remember how the spinal muscles lengthen as they contract so we can fold forwards with control against gravity) meaning we must gently lower into the pose against gravity using some of the strength in the quadriceps and iliopsoas muscles. And indeed by activating the quads and hip flexors we can use the concept of reciprocal inhibition to good effect in this pose where as we contract them the opposite hamstring muscles & quads relax.

Benefits:

Stretches the hamstrings
Stretches the hip flexors

Strengthens the spinal & abdominal muscles
Can create feeling of exhilaration

Good targeted preparation

Hip flexor stretches; hamstring stretches; hip & groin openers; back mobilisers and strengtheners; long-term poses developing good abdominal control and strength

Cautions

Avoid if hamstring or groin injury, sacroiliac strain, back pain; for pregnancy take softer option.

Modifications

Practice softer preparatory poses.

Use of bricks & padding

We can place hands upon bricks and place padding beneath the hips.

Developments & Variations

One leg lift

We can lift rear lower leg, toes pointing to ceiling



