

Navasana (Boat pose)

Pronounced naah-vaah-suh-nuh the word nava means boat in Sanskrit

This balance is called the boat as the shape of the pose resembles that of a boat balanced within the water.



Teaching Points:

Stage one

- Start in dandasana (staff pose) bending both knees, draw the knees in towards the chest. Place hands to the ground either side of the thighs leaning backwards a little with a straight spine. Ensure you are sitting upon your sitting bones, keeping the spine extended, sternum lifted. Can keep heels to the floor or lift the heels from the floor, keeping knees bent, so shins are parallel to the ground. You could stay here if necessary with hands lightly touching the floor either side of thighs.

Stage two

- Now if possible slowly lift both arms extending them forwards at shoulder height, palms facing. Could stay here with knees bent, engaging the abdominal muscles, chest open, shoulders relaxed down away from ears. Breathing easily, face soft.

Stage three

- If possible now straighten both legs keeping the chest open and the spine lengthened. You could stay here. Remember to continue to breathe as easily & smoothly as possible keeping the body relaxed and strong.
- To exit simply lower feet and arms and after a few moments enter a suitable counterpose.

Caution:

Keep on the sitting bones rather than rolling under on to the sacrum. Do not allow the spine to round, any collapsing of the spine means we need to take a modification until enough strength has been built up. The spine must be in a neutral position of pure extension.

Drishti point: Be aware of tips of toes

Benefits:

Strengthens the back and abdominals
Tones visceral organs
Improves digestion

Increases concentration & confidence
Increases balance
Lifts energy

Good preparation

Poses developing good abdominal awareness and strength, back strengtheners, thigh strengtheners, hip flexor strengtheners, hamstring stretches

Cautions & possible modifications

- Abdominal conditions/weakness: keep feet to floor and perhaps simply lean backwards a little whilst holding behind the thighs. Alternatively work as below in one leg lift from dandasana.
- Pregnancy: avoid this pose, taking an alternative instead

Simple versions and modifications



Block behind buttocks to provide some support
Hold beneath legs to assist the stay in boat hold beneath thighs.
Hands to floor where we can modify the pose by keeping fingertips to the floor.



One leg lift from dandasana

We can keep one leg aligned along the floor and practice lifting the other leg first to a bent position and then to an extended position. This is a good preparation for moving into boat and enables students to have a sense of how it feels to lengthen the hamstrings when seated. It is a good modification to use when a student must not overly engage the abdominals.

Variations & Developments



Bound boat

Here we can take hold of big toes with the index fingers and initially keep both legs bent. When we are ready we can straighten both legs whilst maintaining balance.

Arms flexed overhead

It is possible to increase the intensity of the pose by holding arms overhead so leverage dramatically increases.

Dynamic Boat

It is possible to lift into boat from a supine position where the hands are placed beneath the lower back, palms face downwards. When we are ready to lift we press down into hands and forearms lifting the upper and lower body simultaneously. We can then keep the hands to the floor or lift them to shoulder height. We can lift and lower several times if wished. This is also a good transition to be used in a practice when we moving from lying to seated poses.



Feet placed upon a chair or exercise ball

A good variation is to keep both hands to the floor and place the heels of both feet upon a chair seat or an exercise ball. This helps to build strength within the thighs, back and abdominal muscles. Do ensure that the support cannot move!

Adjustments

We can kneel behind a student who allows the back to round and very gently place a knee against the back as we support the shoulders with our hands. The student can keep the knees bent and simply lift the feet a little way off the floor. This gives the student an opportunity to experience the pose correctly. It may also be helpful to hold the weight of the legs a little when a student has extended the legs but feels the legs to be trembling. Ideally however in both situations the students will work alone and gradually develop their strength with practice!