

Supta Padangusthasana – Supine Hand to Big Toe Pose

Pronounced soop-tuh-paah-daahng-oost-aah-suh-nuh the word supta means supine or reclining, pada means foot and angustha means big toe in Sanskrit



This pose is a supine pose where one leg is flexed at the hip, and if possible the same side hand holds the big toe. There are however many modifications, one of which is shown above and many interesting variations we can practice.

Teaching Points:

Start:

- Lie semi-supine and decide if the lower leg will stay bent with foot to floor, and if a belt is needed; padding under head may also be needed if the chin lifts upwards

Enter:

- Lift the right leg upwards, straightening the leg, ensuring the lower back remains comfortable; if needed keep the upper leg a little bent at the knee
- Take hold of the big toe of the right foot if possible with the right hand, left arm relaxed out to the side along the floor. To gauge if this is possible then ensure the right shoulder and the neck remains relaxed and the right hip stays to the floor without any compression or twisting within the back.
- If this is not possible then place a belt around the ball of the right foot, so that the heel can lift up and the toes be drawn downwards; hold low down the belt, with elbows bent, chest & shoulders relaxed.

Stay:

- As we gently breathe relax the muscles of the whole body, consciously releasing any tightness experienced.
- Keep both hips to the floor as we stay, imagining the head of the right femur is falling into the ground.
- If possible we can straighten the left leg along the ground, toes pointing upwards or stay with the left leg bent, foot to floor.

Exit:

- To exit, exhaling bend the upper leg and let it lower, perhaps initially squeezing the thigh to abdomen before returning the foot to floor
- Working to the other side

Benefits:

Stretches and tones the legs, especially the hamstrings; indeed it is a true measure of the flexibility of hamstrings as the torso is fixed.

Increases flexibility in hips and groin

Some variations where we curl upwards also aid digestion

Good preparation

Mobilise hips, more dynamic hamstring stretches such as supine double leg lift where both legs straighten to ceiling as arms are carried overhead and then legs & arms lower again.

Cautions

- Low back conditions, sacroiliac strain & general inflexibility: use a belt & can keep lower leg bent, foot to floor

- Vertigo: turn head to one side
- Hyperextension at the knee: keep the knee a little bent

Simple versions and modifications

Bent lower leg and use of the belt

Very useful possibilities for many students.

Variations & Developments

Abdominal Curl

We can inhale and then as we exhale we can curl upwards lifting the chest and head as we slide the hands up along the straightened leg upwards, bending elbows . We must keep both hips to the ground, again the upper leg head of femur dropping to the ground. If the lower leg is straight then keeping that leg active, toes pointing to the ceiling.

As we stay we can relax the shoulders, keeping the neck extended and relaxed.

To exit we exhale and slide hands down as we lower the upper body and bend the top leg.

Transit into a Hip-Opener & Twist

At full stretch we can lower a leg to the opposite side into a twist. Here we will most likely need to use a belt as we need to keep the spine fully extended, and if the torso becomes bent then we have gone too far.

We can also let the upper leg lower into a hip-opening pose and here again both hips must stay down against the ground with good use of the belt, both ends being held in the near side hand.

These are quite intense movements for the hip joints and the pelvis so for both possibilities caution for low back conditions and sacroiliac conditions. Remember these movements can potentially place excessive pressure across the sacrum and into the lower lumbar vertebrae.

Adjustments

Ideally we will verbally instruct and offer extra aids as needed. Here we will need to emphasize how the body must stay as open as possible.

We will need to scan that chins are not lifted; that the lower leg and foot is active when straight; that the lifted leg hip is to the floor; offering aids as needed.