

Supta Virasana (Reclining Hero Pose)



*Pronounced soop-tuh veer-aah-suh-nuh the word
supta means reclining and vira means hero in Sanskrit*

This is an intermediate reclining pose which provides an intense stretch for the quadriceps. In Hindu Mythology the thighs are seen as a symbol of great strength and virility.

When practicing this asana there are however many 'hotspots' i.e. inherently vulnerable areas to consider to include the knees which are in extreme flexion and may be inadvertently rotated causing strain within the knee ligaments; also within the lumbar region where the back may be drawn into excessive hyperextension creating unwanted compression. Sometimes this pose is also taught with the crown of head placed to the ground much as we find in Matsyasana, Fish pose, so this would also then include hyperextension at the cervical spine with potential compression of vertebrae, arteries and nerves. There is also extreme plantar flexion at ankle joints so we must be aware that the associated ligaments and tendons are not adversely stretched. For all of these reasons this asana must be treated with respect and self-awareness.

Teaching Points:

Stage one:

- Come to vajrasana, kneeling position, and ensure this is a comfortable position, could stay here placing blocks beneath buttocks, blanket beneath shins etc. if necessary.

Stage two:

- If possible sit down between the ankles, keeping the front of the feet to the floor, if necessary sit on a block or two but ensure the top of the feet are against the floor, inner arches against the outer thighs. The thighs must be placed hip width at most.
- Some student find it helpful to manually shift their calf muscles outwards before sitting down in virasana.
- This stage may take a long time to master, a few minutes each day for several months, and we must not move on to supta virasana until it has been mastered.
- This stage requires considerable ankle flexion and internal hip rotation. If knees or ankles are painful then we must desist and return to stage one.

Stage three:

- Take hands to feet, inhaling lengthen spine
- Exhaling lower on to one elbow at a time so forearms are placed on the ground; keep the spine lengthened, abdominals engaged, moving ribcage away from hips
- Keep the feet active and check the knees and lower back remain comfortable, also that the neck is free of tension, if there is discomfort return to the previous stage.
- If necessary lower onto a bolster or similar. Do not allow the abdomen to sink.

Stage four:

- If can continue then place arms one by one against your side and lower the back towards the ground, resting the back of the head and shoulders against the ground
- Focus more upon the opening at the hip flexors (rectus femoris & iliopsoas) than trying to lie the torso flat against the ground, placing padding beneath the hips, shoulders and head as needed
- If the ribcage lifts upwards excessively then this indicates a tight groin so try to lower the front of the ribcage and tuck the tailbone under to ensure the lower back does not become overly compressed.
- Stay releasing the body to gravity, can take arms overhead to be placed on the floor
- In the full pose we can expect the head, shoulders, buttocks, shins, tops of feet & arms to be against the floor.

- Keep the front of the body open and the spine long without compression in the lower back, it can help to imagine drawing the tailbone towards knees to reduce lumbar hyperextension.

To exit

- To exit, place hands to sides of waist, press down into elbow & forearms to lift shoulders, straighten one arm at a time to lift the torso from the base upwards, keeping the neck relaxed at all times, lifting it last.

Note: We must not push our way into this pose as we can easily exert pressure upon knees and the lumbar region. Indeed hip extension whilst **internally rotating at the hips is usually more challenging for students generally**. The pose must be practiced with mindfulness of the inner experience.

Note: Raising arms overhead to lie upon the ground behind the head can cause the lower back to lift into more hyperextension because the latissimus dorsi has an attachment point in the lower back region. So again students must work mindfully and avoid raising arms if this occurs.

We can place a towel or similar between thighs and ask students to squeeze it to help create internal rotation, and align the thighs

Benefits:

Stretches quadriceps and iliopsoas (hip flexors)

Increases flexibility in ankles and feet

Opens the front of the torso

Creates feeling of being grounded

Good preparation

Ankle mobilisers, hip flexor stretches (quadriceps & iliopsoas), hip extensor stretches (Gluteus maximus & hamstrings), back mobilisers, hip rotators stretches esp. for internal rotation e.g. animal pose (zig-zag), arm flexion, esp. releasing the latissimus dorsi at sides of waist

Cautions:

- Pregnancy avoid supine pose, could practice soft modified version of camel instead
- Knee conditions, take modifications or alternative
- Back conditions should avoid this pose as needed, using an alternative
- Sciatica and low back pain can benefit from the internal hip rotation and hip extension, but if the hip rotators or the hip flexors (rectus femoris & iliopsoas) are tight then the full pose can be very unhelpful.
- Neck condition: may find lowering into the pose is stressful and so stay upright or take an alternative

Modifications:



- If when lying back a student finds knees lift, pad beneath the shoulders
- If the spine hyperextends excessively or there is tightness in feet, ankles or knees remember to try padding beneath hips & shoulders to help the body relax
- We can try having just one knee flexed