**Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (upward facing pose)**

# *Pronounced oord-vah moo-kah shvan-aah-suh-nuh the word urdhva means upwards, mukha is face and shvana is a dog in Sanskrit.*

This pose is named for the way in which a dog stretches out.

**Teaching Points:**

***Stage one***

***Bhujanasana***

* Can first explore cobra, and some students can stay here. Focus upon moving all areas of the spine, rather than those which more freely move.
* Hands either side of lower ribs, if possible (remember the lower down the body hands are placed, the deeper the backbend will be). Legs hip width or together if possible.
* Elbows above wrists, and tucked into body as inhale and lift, moving forwards as well as upwards as lead with crown and sternum, keeping hips to floor; activate legs, try rotating inner thighs to ceiling and relaxing buttocks; press down upon tops of feet, keeping all toes to the floor, including little toes (this helps to activate quadriceps)
* Lifting the sternum, externally rotating shoulders, try to draw hands as if backwards to help open the chest.
* Keep the chin parallel to the ground to engage the hyoid bone, and the front of the body, only hyperextending at the neck if ready to do so.
* To exit, slowly lower feeling all muscles gradually releasing.

***Stage Two***

***Bricks beneath hands (if bricks are available: note these are not the softer blocks)***

* Teaching points as below but each hand placed upon a solid blocks to provide more space within the spinal column to work with the thoracic region; reduces any adverse pressure upon the lumbar region as long as align the wrists below shoulders and feet placed correctly to enable lengthening throughout the whole spine
* ***Stage Three***

***Lift from prone***

* In a prone position, legs together or at hip distance apart, chin to floor, hands placed either side of the lower ribcage, fingers spread wide
* Inhaling press tops of feet to floor as press hands down to the floor and as if moving backwards, lifting the chest, straightening arms. Draw collarbones apart, externally rotating the arms at shoulders, drawing chest forwards of arms.
* Check wrists are beneath shoulders, adjusting position of feet if needed
* Lift both hips and legs from the floor, keeping both legs active; may help to keep little toes firmly pressing to the ground and rotating inner thighs towards the ceiling, as keep buttocks relaxed.
* Ensure the whole spine is lengthening, especially at the thoracaic region where the chest moves forwards of the arms, lifting forwards and upwards, moving towards extension.
* Keep the chin paralell to the floor to engage the hyoid bone, creating length in the spine. Only lifting the chin into hyperextension if comfortable to do so.
* Ensure the lower back remains comfortable, as we have to work against gravity creating excessve lumbar extension, which can be excerbated by stiffness in the thoracaic region; the hip flexors will have to be engaged to counteract this tendency and students may benefit from tucking the tailbone under and so can try this option if needed.

***Stage Four***

***Lift from Chataranga Dandasana***

* If it is possible to enter through chataranga dandasana which will require more strength and precision. It can be difficult to move toes on a sticky mat but when we extend them make sure they are taken back an inch or so, to ensure the balance of the upfacing dog pose is maintained at the shoulders and wrists.
* Note: Limit the movement in the lumbar and cervical regions of the spine, focusing upon the thoracic region.

**Benefits:**

Develops confidence

Tones leg muscles

Enhances flexibility of back muscles

Stretches chest and shoulder muscles

Lifts energy

#### Good preparation

Creating flexibility in thoracic spine: twists, simpler backbends, developing flexibility in shoulders, abdominal and back strengtheners, hip flexor releasers.

**Contra-indications & possible modifications**

* For back conditions can practice soft bhujangasana or sphinx if needed
* For wrist conditions or injury can practice soft bhujangasana or sphinx
* For pregnancy caution with backbends, cat, cat balance or plank can be practiced
* For abdominal conditions can practice cat, cat balance or plank if needed
* For HBP, Heart Conditions, Mature Diabetes, rest as needed

**Adjustments**

* In pose can gently smooth around the shoulders from front to back suggesting an external rotation and then slide hands downwards at shoulder blades inviting the student to retract and depress shoulder blades
* In pose can place a hand across upper chest just beneath collar bones spreading hand wide to indicate opening at chest and can place a hand at thoracic spine to encourage straightening of the thoracic spine to help ensure not compensating at the cervical or lumbar regions. Remember for backbends it is the extension or straightening of the thoracic region, which dictates the intensity of the arch.

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