



Bhujangasana & Salabhasana

Description

(Cobra Pose, Sphinx, Locust Pose)

Bhujangasana

boo-jawng-GAWS-ahna

â??bhujangaâ?• = cobra

Cobra Pose

Niralamba Bhujangasana

â??niralambaâ?• = unsupported

Unsupported Cobra Pose

Salamba Bhujangasana

â??salambaâ?• = supported

Supported Cobra Pose

Also known as: Sphinx Pose

Salabhasana

shawl-uh-BOSS-ahna



â??salabhaâ?• = locust

Locust Pose

Heart of Poses

Backbends

Notes

- These backbends are accessible with widely useful [benefits](#).
- These poses are beneficial for strengthening spinal muscles and preparing for other backbends such as *Ustrasana* (Camel Pose), *Setu Bandhasana* (Bridge Pose), *Dhanurasana* (Bow Pose) and *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (Wheel / Upward Facing Bow Pose).
- When practicing versions of *Salabhasana* that include shoulder extension, the pose also helps to prepare for *Salamba Sarvangasana* (Shoulderstand).
- These poses offer more strength-building than some backbends because there isnâ??t a linking of upper and lower body to gain leverage.
- These poses tend to appear easier than they are. New students need instruction in subtleties including moving their focus from the lumbar spine to the entire length of the spine.
- See [Cautions](#) regarding low back and straining.

See Also

- [Urdhva Mukha Svanasana \(Upward Facing Dog Pose\)](#)
- [Dhanurasana \(Bow Pose\)](#)
- [Asana Categories](#)
- [General Alignment Principles](#)
- [Alignment Cueing](#)

Effects / Benefits

Energy, Mood, Emotion

Effects to energy, mood or emotion may include the following.

- Energizing.
- Exhilarating, uplifting.
- Promote fuller breathing.

Inner Body

Inner body effects may include the following.



- Cobra Pose stretches abdominals, opening space for diaphragm.
- Cobra Pose stimulates thyroid, kidneys and adrenals.

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)

- Breaks up tension in back, shoulders and neck.
- Strengthens erector spinae and hip extensors.
- Increases spinal flexibility.
- Opens chest, expand rib cage.
- Stretches upper abdominals.
- Strengthens shoulders.
- Provides backbending without requiring flexibility in shoulders and thighs.

STRETCH SPINE WITHOUT NEEDING FLEXIBILITY IN SHOULDERS

All backbends will ease open your spine and cultivate flexibility in your torso. But *Bhujangasana* stands out because it allows you to strengthen and stretch the spine and torso without demanding flexibility in the shoulders and thighs. When you do the pose, focus on lengthening your spine and observing the sensations in your back. â?? Andrea Ferretti & Jason Crandell

Salabhasana (Locust Pose)

- Strengthens lower back muscles.
- Tones entire back side of body, including legs and glutes.
- Tones abdominal muscles.
- Stretches front side of body.
- Improves posture.
- In some variations, combines shoulder extension (reaching back behind)â??a much-needed movement due to its rarity in daily life â?? and backbending. (Julie Gudmestad)
- Provides backbending without weight bearing on wrists.

Therapeutic Uses*

Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)

- [Depression](#)
- [Digestive Issues](#) â?? The stretch of the abdominals can release gas in the upper digestive tract
- Fatigue
- [Kyphosis](#)
- [Sciatica](#)
- [Upper Back Pain](#)



Salabhasana (Locust Pose)

- Arthritis of Knees • Strengthens leg muscles (Baxter Bell)
- [Depression](#)
- [Hamstring Injury](#)
- [Low Back Pain](#)
- [Sciatica](#) • Can relieve nerve strains that stem from front side of the body

* This pose is often associated with positive effects related to the conditions listed. But unless trained in yoga therapy, teachers are usually advised against prescribing particular asanas to address specific conditions.

Contraindications

Salabhasana (Locust Pose) and *Bhujangasana* (Cobra Pose) are generally not recommended for students with these conditions:

- [Back Injury](#)
- Headache
- [Pregnancy](#)

In addition, Cobra Pose may also be contraindicated for:

- Arthritis of the Neck (Baxter Bell)

See Also: [Cautions](#)

Alternatives

- When contraindicated, you may wish to review [preparatory poses or variations](#).
- Or consider alternative backbends such as those below.
- If backbends as a whole are contraindicated, see [Therapeutic Sequences](#) and/or [Injuries & Conditions](#).

Sphinx Pose

Sphinx Pose is a common alternative or preparation for other backbends. Move arms farther forward to minimize the backbend.



Other Backbends

Other considerations are backbends from a supine position such as [Setu Bandhasana](#) (Bridge) or a [Restorative Pose](#) such as shown here.



Cautions

When choosing a variation or alternative, consider the following:

1. The heart / purpose of the pose.
2. The role it is playing in the sequence.
3. Why the pose is not accessible or appropriate for this student at this time.

Neck Issues



Students with [neck issues](#) can keep neck in neutral with the gaze forward or down, or support the forehead on a prop.

Straining, Jutting, Hunching



Watch out for straining, jutting chin or hunching shoulders by the ears, as shown here.

- Students may strain to get lift rather than distributing the curve evenly.
- Watch for students who hunch the shoulders up by the ears.
- Students may unknowingly over-arch and strain their neck.

Teaching Considerations

- Draw shoulder blades down back.
- Lengthen back of neck.
- Spread length of curve throughout spine.
- See Basic Form, Variations & Going Deeper for ways to help guide students to safer and more effective alignment.

Hernia

For hernia in front belly area, Baxter Bell cautions to ensure this doesnâ€™t make it worse and if it does to practice [Bridge Pose](#) as an alternative.

Improper Grounding



Watch out for misalignment in arms and hands, and for uneven weight distribution in hands, as shown here.

Teaching Considerations

- Spread fingers evenly. Press evenly into hands. If inner edges of hands are lifting, press the inner edges of hands more firmly. See more in Verbal Cues.
- Lessen or remove weight from hands.
- See Basic Form, Variations & Going Deeper for ways to help guide students to safer and more effective alignment.

Basic Form

Set Up



For All Prone Backbends

Optional: Pad hipbones with blanket or by folding mat.

1. Begin in prone position, resting forehead or chin on floor.
2. Straighten legs, toes pointed. Do not splay feet.
3. Choose hand placement.
 - Forearms flat on floor. (Sphinx)
 - Fingertips in line with top of shoulders or middle of chest. (Cobra)
 - Arms at the sides. Palms up or down by hips. (Locust)
4. Draw shoulder blades down back. In Cobra, hug elbows to side ribs.
5. Refine lower body alignment: root pinkie toes down, spiral legs inward, place pelvis in cat tilt, avoid squeezing buttocks.
6. Activate back muscles by lengthening out through top of head and toes. (David Swenson)

Moving into Pose

Bhujangasana



Inhale*

- Press palms, pubic bone, thighs, tops of feet to floor.
- Option: keep hands off floor or light with tented fingers.
- Or place hands on floor and pull as though sliding floor backward.
- Lift and press chest forward through shoulders. The movement is forward and up.
- Keep chin level.

*Although the standard instruction is to inhale while entering into a back bend, it can be very helpful to enter into this basic back bend on an exhalation. For many people who are locked into a belly breathing pattern, their inhalation actually restricts thoracic extension and rib cage expansion. This is because a belly breath is accomplished by restricting rib movement while the diaphragm contracts. â?? Leslie Kaminoff

Salabhasana A & B



Inhale

- Legs are either hip-width or, traditionally, together.
- Lift chest, ribs, thighs and feet off floor.
- Or, lift parts as shown in the many [Variations](#).
- Keep legs straight and active.
- Reach inner thighs up.
- Feel both lengthening and lifting.
- Breathe smoothly.

Salabhasana C



- Take arms overhead by ears as if in Mountain Pose.
- Draw abs in.
- Press pubic bone down.
- Inhale, lift.

Gaze

- Nose

Hold Time

- 5 or 6 breaths or 30 seconds to a minute

Coming Out

- Exhale, come down slowly, incrementally.
- Maintain length while lowering.
- Keep elbows in toward body.

To Emphasize



- Draw elbows in (for Cobra Pose).
- Root shoulder blades down.
- Avoid neck strain.
- Bring thoracic spine toward heart.
- Maintain length.

Verbal Cues

It's typically advised that teachers provide no more than three instructions per pose so that students have time to work with the teaching. Here you'll find many options from which to choose. Some cues make the same point in different ways, and occasionally some can be contradictory, so please try them out for yourself. When cues are unusual or uniquely described, we have noted the source.

Bhujangasana & Salabhasana (Both)

Head, Neck & Shoulders

1. Draw shoulder blades away from ears.
2. Keep back of neck long.
3. Avoid jutting chin outward.

Torso

1. Hug elbows to ribs.
2. Avoid pushing ribs forward which hardens low back.
3. Broaden collarbones.
4. Draw chest forward.
5. Breathe into your back.
6. Spread curve evenly through full length of spine by expanding chest through shoulders.
7. Use back to lift chest more than pushing with arms.



8. Firm belly toward spine
9. Don't squeeze buttocks.
10. Observe sensations in back: Are lower, middle and upper back all relatively involved and equally sensational? If not, make adjustments to find this harmony.

More

1. Keep legs parallel.
2. Think of this as a lengthening.
3. Be as strain-free as possible.
4. Be patient and curious.
5. Observe and feel.

LEAD WITH CHEST, NOT CHIN

When you rise up into your backbend, lead with your chest, not your chin. When the head / chin leads the way, you cheat yourself out of the backbend, and it doesn't feel so great for your neck, either. This doesn't mean your head just hangs forward; rather your head follows the movement of your spine. As you move into your backbend, keep your collarbones broad and lift your sternum, moving the back of your head back to follow the lift of your chest. Moving from the back of the head here as opposed to the chin will help you keep the back of the neck long as you open your throat and move into your full expression of the backbend. â?? Kat Heagberg

DISTRIBUTE THE CURVE EVENLY

The main point to remember when doing Cobra pose is to PULL BACK with the hands instead of pushing them down. That way you distribute the curve more evenly throughout the back. The point of the pose is not to curve the upper body back, but to lift the chest forward and up, away from the navel. That's all. â?? Olga Kabel

Bhujangasana Specifically



Legs

1. Place tops of feet on floor.
2. Spread toes.
3. Activate quads but relax buttocks.
4. Keep pelvis and navel on floor.

Arms

1. Align wrists under elbows.
2. Draw elbows toward midline.

3. Place palms flat and press evenly through hands.
4. Pull back with the hands in order to press chest forward and distribute curve evenly through spine.

Weight-Bearing Alignment of Hands

In poses where the hands support the body weight, consider the following guidelines.

1. Place hands shoulder-distance apart.
2. Align wrist creases with front of mat.
3. Check to be sure palm is flat on earth, fingers spread (but not excessively so).
4. Watch for uneven spacing between fingers and/or a pinky that wings out too far. (However, in the case of [Dupuytren's Contracture](#), uneven spacing may be desirable.)
5. Press down with hands so that all fingers and knuckles are pressing evenly.
6. Ensure weight is not concentrated in wrist and heel of hand. You may need to focus on pressing into knuckles and roots of fingers to avoid excessive pressure in wrists.
7. John Friend has also suggested pressing with pads of fingers and pulling them back isometrically.
8. Once hands are aligned properly, you may wish to visualize drawing energy up from the center of the palms.
9. A thicker yoga mat may be helpful, but it should still be firm. Practicing on a soft or cushioned surface may cause hyperextension of the wrist.

Bhujangasana (Cobra & Sphinx) Variations

Hand Placement Variations

Hands More Forward



For low back issues or to lessen the intensity for any reason, set up with hands more forward.

Bend Elbows

Vary Intensity



Vary bend in elbows to increase or decrease intensity.

Salabhasana (Locust) • Variations

• Superman • Variation

Salabhasana C Variation



Arms and/or legs can be taken wide or move wider and closer in increments with the breath.

Forearms Clasped in Front

Arm Variation



This accessible arm variation provides an option while building strength in back muscles.

More Variations & Adaptations

See Variations for many more considerations.

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