



Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

Description

Matsyasana (Fish Pose)

â??matsyaâ? = fish

â??Matsyaâ? is also the name of a mythological incarnation of [Vishnu](#)

Uttana Padasana (Extended Leg Pose)

â??uttanaâ? = intense stretch

â??padaâ? = leg or foot

Also known as: Raised Legs Pose

Heart of Pose

Backbend

Notes

- *Matsyasana* is a counterpose for [Salamba Sarvangasana \(Shoulderstand\)](#), [Halasana \(Plow Pose\)](#) and other poses where chin has been to chest and [Jalandhara Bandha](#) engaged.
- Not recommended for [vata](#) imbalance. (Joseph LePage)

MATSYA, THE FISH INCARNATION OF LORD VISHNU

This posture is dedicated to Matsya the Fish Incarnation of Visnu, the source and maintainer of the universe and of all things. â?? B.K.S. Iyengar



See Also

- [Asana Categories](#)
- [General Alignment Principles](#)
- [Alignment Cueing](#)

Effects / Benefits

People Experience Poses Differently

- The following effects may be associated with this pose.
- Knowing such common effects is typically useful for planning sequences. However, since there are no universal truths in how different people experience poses, please use caution with this information.
- For example, rather than telling students what to expect when practicing a pose or technique, you may wish to invite them to take note of effects on their breathing and their mind, and what they feel in their body.

See Also

- [Wise Word Choice](#)
- [Inclusive & Accepting Word Choice](#)
- [Asana Categories Hub](#)
- [Planning & Sequencing Hub](#)

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

- Opens chest.
- Stretches muscles between the ribs (intercostals).
- Releases tension in upper and middle back.
- Stretches shoulders and neck.
- Strengthens shoulders and upper back.
- Opens diaphragm.

Energy, Mood, Emotion

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

- Uplifting.

Inner Body

Inner body effects may include the following.



- Activates thymus, stimulating the immune system.
- Stimulates liver and kidneys. (Zo Newell)
- Massages heart and lungs.
- Improves circulation to the breasts and lungs. (Zo Newell)

From the Experts

A SURGE OF BLOOD IS SENT TO THE THROAT AREA

This asana is the counterpose for the previous inversions in which the chin has been locked into the chest and [Jalandhara Bandha](#) has been engaged. By lifting the chin and drawing the head back, there is a surge of blood sent to the throat area. This benefits the thyroid. With the chest expanding fully, the breath is encouraged. Feel the surge of life force moving through the spine. David Swenson

BACKBENDING ACTIONS

The actions you learn here should be translated into all the backbending poses. Erich Schiffmann

IMPORTANCE OF A FLEXIBLE SPINE

To be flexible like the fish does not mean to be spineless. Fish have light and delicate spines which, supported by their muscles, give them a strength from which the practitioner of asanas can learn a great deal. An inflexible spine gives a person the appearance of age. Problems in this area point to a poor self-image, depression, aggressiveness, or a strength of self-will that prevents flexibility, a very important factor in human relations. Swami Sivananda Radha

Reflections & Inspiration

HEART-CENTERED REFLECTIONS

The first time I ever tried Fish pose, I remember wanting to get out of it fast. Lifting my chest created an openness that was unfamiliar and a little frightening, like opening a creaky old door that had been closed for years. What was in there? Fish elevates the heart center until it becomes the highest point in the body. Sounds good but why did it hurt? As I paid attention to feelings and images that surfaced in the pose, I started to understand that although the heart is about love, it is also about pain. I had gathered a little storehouse of old hurts that needed opening up. Fish pose insists on open-heartedness, which, I found takes patience and courage to develop. Exposing the hurts to the light and actually looking at them brought a new freedom. Swami Lalitananda

EMOTIONAL ENERGY EXERCISE

Before going into Fish pose, you can practice lifting up the emotions to the heart center. Start by standing and hold the hands palm up just above the navel. Smoothly lift the hands up to the heart center as if lifting the emotions up to the heart. Then extend the arms out full length, forming a circle as you bring the hands back down to the area above the navel. Say, 'I am functioning from my center.' The reinforcement of hearing this repeated aloud is very effective. Observe the effects of this



exercise on the pose. Swami Sivananda Radha

Uttana Padasana

The following is from Tirisula Yoga:

- Stretches and strengthens abdominals.
- Engages quads.
- Engages inner thighs.
- Engages glutes.
- Tones low back.
- Strengthens and mobilizes spine.
- Contracts erector spinae, trapezuis and romboid muscles, expanding chest.
- Engages deltoid and pectoralis muscles.
- Flexes hips.

Effective Lead Up Postures:

- Warm up the spine with such practices [Cat-Cow Flow](#).
- Practice hip flexion in such poses as [Prasarita Padottanasana \(Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend\)](#) and [Paschimottanasana \(Seated Forward Bend\)](#).
- Engage abs, quads and glutes in [Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana \(Extended Hand to Toe Pose\)](#) to prepare to lift legs in [Uttana Padasana](#).

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.

Contraindications

- [Back Injury](#)
- [Heart Disease](#)
- [High Blood Pressure](#)
- Hyperthyroid
- [Neck Injury or Pain](#)
- [Shoulder Pain](#)
- Stroke

Basic Form

Set Up



1. Begin in [Padmasana \(Lotus Posture\)](#), [Sukhasana \(Easy Posture\)](#) or [Dandasana \(Staff Pose\)](#).
2. Place hands beside hips.
3. Lengthen torso up.

Moving In & Out of Pose



Full Pose

1. From [Urdhva Padmasana \(Upward Lotus\)](#), [Pindasana \(Embryo\)](#), [Padmasana \(Lotus\)](#) or [Sukhasana \(Easy Posture\)](#)
2. Exhale, lean back onto forearms. Adjust feet to secure leg position.
3. Grasp big toes or take hands to floor overhead.
4. Inhale, place forearms on floor, pressing to arch chest up & take crown of head to floor
5. Exhale, press knees to floor.
6. Stretch chest away from pelvis.
7. To come out, inhale up to *Padmasana*.
8. Re-cross legs other way and repeat.

Straight Leg Variations

1. From [Dandasana](#), take forearms to floor fingers just touch hips.

2. Curve chest up.
3. Release head back.

To Emphasize



- Press down into elbows.
- Reach up through chest.
- Reach outward through chin.

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.

Straight Leg Versions



Legs & Feet

1. Keep feet together and legs strong.
2. Press inner legs together.
3. Point and activate toes.

Sacrum, Back, Chest

1. Create a smooth and gentle arch with back.
2. Release sacrum and tailbone.
3. Root hips down and reach chest up.
4. Use breath to open restrictions in rib cage.

Shoulders & Arms

1. Root forearms and shoulders down into floor. (Baron Baptiste)
2. Let go of holding in shoulder blades.
3. Squeeze shoulder blades together and down.
4. “As in Camel, your shoulder blades are like giant hands pressing your chest upward.” (Baron Baptiste)

Neck, Throat, Face

1. Find a position where the neck is extended without strain or pain.
2. Soften eyes, jaw, and throat.

IMAGINE YOURSELF FLOATING

Soften your eyes, jaw, and throat. Imagine yourself floating, supported by the living water beneath you.
â?? Zo Newell

Full Pose



Legs & Feet

1. Stretch thighs away from torso.
2. Draw knees together and press them down on exhale. (Silva Mehta)
3. Press thighs down with feet.

Sacrum, Back, Chest

1. Use spinal strength to lift chest, bringing rib cage away from waist.
2. Puff upward through the chest. (Erich Schiffmann)
3. Keep lumbar down.

Shoulders & Arms

1. Do not support weight with arms; elbows are off ground.
2. Pull with hands.
3. Press elbows toward floor.

Neck & Chin

- Stretch outward through chin.

Variations Summary



Straight Leg Variations

1. Palms down, hands under hips, head to floor.



2. Palms pointing in, fingers to hips, head off floor.
3. Hands in *Namaste* at heart.
4. Greater bend in elbows, head off floor. (photo below)
5. Forearms on floor, head back to bolster.
6. Head off floor, neck neutral (or chin at chest) rather than dropped back.
7. Hands clasped & overhead. (Erich Schiffmann)
8. From hands clasped, clasp elbows; stretch them outward & then squeeze them down to floor. (Erich Schiffmann)
9. Rolled blanket behind chest; rest of blanket under head; strap around forearms just below elbow; arms overhead. (Rodney Yee)
10. Same as previous variation but head on mat rather than blanket. (Rodney Yee)
11. Block under shoulder blades, strap around upper arms. (Rodney Yee)

Lotus Variations

1. Rather than holding feet, arms to floor overhead.
2. Rather than Lotus, cross the legs, taking hands to thighs.
3. Lay back onto a bolster, lengthwise on spine.
4. Arms beside torso.

More Variations & Alternatives

1. *Dandasana* Variation: Hands behind hips, fingers pointing away from body if possible (photo below has fingers other way), lift chest, curve head back.
2. Legs in Hero, hands behind hips, fingers pointing away from body; lift chest, release neck back. (Erich Schiffmann)

Next Step

Introduction

As they begin to feel accomplished in a pose, some students like to know â??where they are headedâ? • i.e. a deeper variation of the pose or another pose that uses the skills from this one. Here are some considerations.

Uttana Padasana



A next step from *Matsyasana* can be [Uttana Padasana \(Extended Leg Posture\)](#)

- Variation 1: With head and legs on floor, raise arms to 45-degree angle, palms touching.
- Variation 2: With forearms and palms down at hips, lift legs to 45-degree angle from floor, feet together, toes pointed.
- Full Pose: Lift both the arms and legs to 45-degree angles.

Variations

Legs Straight, Head Off Floor



Blanket Behind Heart



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