



Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog)

Description

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

OORD-vah MOO-kah shvon-AHS-ahna

â??urdhvaâ?• = raised or upward

â??mukhaâ?• = face

â??svanaâ?• = dog

Upward Facing Dog Pose

Heart of Pose

Backbend

See Also

- [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.

- Stretch abdominals, opening space for diaphragm.

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

- Build upper body strength.
- Strengthen lower body.
- Stretch the front body: chest, abdomen, hips and legs.
- Strengthen the back.

Contraindications

This pose generally not recommended for students with these conditions:

- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Headache
- [Low Back Injury](#)
- [Pregnancy](#)
- [Shoulder Injury](#)
- [Wrist Injury](#)

Choosing Alternatives

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

Prone Backbends

Sphinx Pose and other [prone backbends](#) such as *Bhujangasana* (Cobra Pose) and *Salabhasana* (Locust Pose) are common alternatives or preparations for other backbends.

In Sphinx Pose shown below, move arms farther forward to minimize the backbend.



Other Considerations

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.

Warm Up Before Practicing

Be cautious that students are properly warmed up before practicing this pose.

General warm-up options include:

- [Cat-Cow Flow](#)
- [Other Warm-Up Flows](#)
- [Half Sun Salutes](#)
- [Plank Pose](#)
- See also: [Research & Study Guides: Warm-Up Practices](#) (includes links to stretches and flows)

Preparatory backbend options include:

- [Bhujangasana \(Cobra Pose\)](#)
- [Setu Bandhasana \(Bridge Pose\)](#)

EXPERT ADVISEMENT

Upward facing dog isn't a pose you want to go into if you're cold. • Warm your body up first—particularly your spine—before practicing this asana. —Kathryn Ashworth

Back Pain

If student experiences back pain while practicing this pose that is not relieved from proper alignment, choose alternatives. See Contraindications above for alternative suggestions.

See Also

- [Low Back Pain](#)
- [Neck, Shoulder & Upper Back & Neck Issues.](#)

Straining, Jutting Chin, Shoulders by Ears



- Watch out for students who hunch the shoulders up by the ears.
- Watch out for students who strain to get lift rather than distributing the curve evenly.
- Watch out for the tendency to unknowingly overarch and strain the neck.

Teaching Cues

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

Repetition Increases Risk

As part of [Surya Namaskar & Vinyasa Flow Yoga](#), this pose may be practiced often, thereby increasing potential for injury due to poor form, overuse, or pushing beyond an individual's safe limits.

Have you done 50 headstands today? How about 50 triangle poses? That would seem excessive, wouldn't it? But doing 50 upward facing dog poses a day can be business as usual if you take a vinyasa class. For example, in the Ashtanga Vinyasa Primary Series of K. Pattabhi Jois, you move through upward-facing dog 50 times in a single session because it's part of the Surya Namaskar sequence that links the other asanas together. Don't get me wrong. Doing lots of upward-facing dogs can be a very good thing, provided you do them properly! But if you push beyond your capacity or use bad technique, all that repetition can put a lot of wear and tear on your body, especially your lower back! You can avoid jamming your lower vertebrae together by applying two general principles: put traction on the spine to increase the overall space between the vertebrae, and distribute the

backbend along the whole spine and the hips, so the base of the spine isn't forced to do more than its fair share of bending. — Roger Cole

Weight-Bearing Alignment of Hands

When the hands are supporting the body weight, be cautious about wrist and hand alignment. See Verbal Cues for detail.

Basic Form

Set up



1. Begin in prone position, legs slightly apart, toes pointed. Do not splay feet.
2. Place hands by lower ribs so that wrists are under elbows.
3. Keep forearms vertical, wrists at right angle to floor.
4. Engage low belly.
5. Lift forehead just until back of head is in line with back of pelvis.

Moving into Pose



1. Lead with chest (not chin) to lift upper body.
2. Press feet into floor to lift hips and thighs.
3. Use arms and legs to support lifting and opening of chest.
4. If shoulders are not over wrists, come down and re-position hands.
5. Draw sacrum down and forward, feeling low back long.
6. Traditional pose has neck released back but avoid overextending it.

Alternative

Come into Plank Pose before moving into Upward Facing Dog Pose. (See more [here](#).)

To Emphasize



1. Stack shoulders, elbows and wrists.
2. Press palms and tops of feet down.
3. Engage quads.
4. Lift front of thighs off mat.
5. Reach inner thighs up.

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.

Legs

1. Engage quadriceps.
2. Avoid clenching glutes.
3. Spin inner thighs up.
4. Press tops of feet down.
5. Stretch out through big toe sides of feet. (Kathryn Ashworth)

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.

Shoulders, Arms & Hands

1. Stack shoulders, elbows and wrists in a line.
2. Press entire palms firmly and evenly into floor.
3. Firm arms.
4. Draw shoulders away from ears.
5. Externally rotate upper arms

Torso

1. Keep core engaged.
2. Widen collarbones.
3. Draw shoulder blades down back.
4. Keep chest lifted.
5. Reach chest and torso through arms.
6. Feel the backbend throughout the whole spine, particularly the thoracic spine.
7. Avoid tension in low back.

Neck & Head

As your head moves back slightly, following the movement of your chest, think about moving the *back* of your head back rather than your crown (this will keep the back of your neck long, and the cervical, thoracic, and lumbar spine moving fluidly and seamlessly). — Kathryn Ashworth

1. Keep back of neck long.
2. When keeping head neutral (rather than dropping it back), align head and shoulders and gaze forward.
3. Gaze softly and steadily.

Microbend Elbows

STRAIGHTENING ARMS LEAST IMPORTANT PART

Often, I see students attempt an up dog by first and foremost pushing their arms as straight as possible, resulting in rounded shoulders and a compressed lower back. In actuality, straightening the arms is the least important part of the pose, and getting too overzealous about it can compromise your neck, shoulders, and lower back. Instead, you might find it beneficial to keep a “microbend” in your elbows as you focus on broadening your collarbones and lifting your sternum to access more of a backbend in your thoracic spine (upper back). This little adjustment can be the difference between a backbend that feels restrictive and uncomfortable, and a backbend that feels luxurious and lovely. If it still doesn’t? Stick with cobra for the time being. ?? Kat Heagberg

Variations

Hands Variation

Hands on Blocks



Uses

- More accessible variation to help lift knees up.
- Workshop or otherwise taking more time to incorporate actions of the pose.
- Increase backbending effect.

Alternatives

Other Backbend



Students can experience backbending effects through alternatives such as a flowing [Bridge](#) pose or a [restorative](#) version of a backbend.

Author
michaeljoelhall