



Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

Description

Vrksasana

vrik-SHAHS-uh-nah

â??vrksaâ?• = tree

Tree Pose

Heart of Pose

- Standing Balance
- Spinal Extension

Joint Actions

The following are from Leslie Kaminoffâ??s book, Yoga Anatomy.

- Standing leg: hip neutral extension, internal rotation, adduction; knee extension
- Lifted leg: hip flexion, external rotation, abduction; knee flexion; tibia external rotation; ankle dorsiflexion; foot pronation
- See also: [Joint Movements & ROM](#)

Notes

- Commonly presented as having arms raised upward.
- In Iyengar Yoga, palms meet overhead.
- â??Tight inner thigh muscles might prevent the knee from turning outward. That is why it is important to warm up the inner and outer hips before attempting this pose.â?• (Olga Kabel)

ONE OF THE OLDEST HATHA YOGA POSES IN RECORDED HISTORY



Tree pose (Vrksasana) happens to be one of the oldest Hatha Yoga poses in recorded history, according to Richard Rosen, author of *Original Yoga*. In fact, it is one of only two standing poses from the earliest texts on yoga postures; the other one is a form of Powerful Pose (Utkatasana), also called Chair pose in modern yoga. — Baxter Bell MD

Effects / Benefits

Energy, Mood, Emotion

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

- Develops concentration.
- Promotes equanimity and a feeling of being centered.
- Can bring a sense of peace.
- Promotes a sense of being grounded and "in the body."
- Can increase confidence.

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

- Strengthens and stabilizes legs.
- Stretches hips.
- Develops balance.

Standing on one leg helps strengthen your standing leg, ankle and hips, and holding your arms overhead helps strengthen your upper body and arms. — Baxter Bell MD

Therapeutic Uses*

- Recovering from ankle sprains, after swelling and pain have resolved (Baxter Bell MD)
- [Knee pain](#)

* 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.

Cautions

- Keep big toe and knee of standing leg aligned, pointing forward.
- Do not press into inner knee of standing leg.

ARTHRITIS IN JOINTS OF STANDING LEG



One legged balance poses like *Vrksasana* may put too much pressure on the joints of the standing leg [for those with [arthritis](#) of the hips, knees, or ankles.] â?? Timothy McCall MD

Verbal Cues

1. Begin in [Tadasana \(Mountain Pose\)](#).
2. Beginning with a relatively narrow stance will make it easier to shift weight and move into the pose. (Kat Heagberg)
3. â??Find a straight line of energy through the center of the body, from the inner arches up through the crown of the head.â?• (Claire Missingham)
4. Choose a [drishti](#).
5. Exhale, root down and shift weight into one foot.
6. Bend knee of lifted leg, and lift it up while keeping a long spine.
7. Clasp foot and place it on the inner thigh of grounded leg. (Many teach to place the foot above or below the knee joint although, as in quote below, some find it acceptable.)
8. Press leg into foot and foot into leg.
9. Place hands in Namaste at the heart and stand tall.
10. Breathe evenly while holding the pose.
11. Exhale to release. Repeat on second side.

FOOT AGAINST INNER KNEE?

Contrary to popular belief, it is not inherently harmful to place your foot against your knee in Tree Pose unless you have a knee injury or condition. For most students, this position is safe and comfortable. If youâ??re a teacher, consider replacing fear-based language like â??Place your foot above or below your knee to protect your knee joint,â?• with cues such as, â??If you are working with a knee injury or condition, try placing your foot below or above your knee.â?• â?? Andrew McGonigle

Standing Leg & Foot

Itâ??s usually advised to teach [standing poses](#) â??from the ground up.â?• Avoid focusing on upper body alignment, pose refinements or deepening the expression of the pose until the foundation is properly aligned and steady.

1. Firm standing leg. (Firm outer thigh by contracting the quads.)
2. â??Zip your belly in and your lower ribs together.â?• (Claire Missingham)
3. Press all four corners of foot into earth.
4. Press big toe and inner edge of foot down.
5. Spread toes.
6. Ungrip toes and ground the three corners of the foot instead. (Kat Heagberg)
7. Keep grounded foot pointing straight ahead.
8. Press foot into inner leg and inner leg into foot.
9. Imagine roots reaching down from foot deep into the earth.
10. â??Gather energy from the nutrients and water in the earth beneath you.â?• (Stephanie Pappas)



11. Draw kneecap of standing leg upward.
12. If standing-leg foot cramps, â??you might even find it helpful to visualize â??breathingâ?? down into your footâ?| which can be incredibly soothing and stabilizing.â?• (Kat Heagberg)

ENGAGE MUSCLES AROUND THE KNEE

In general, when I bring attention to the knee joint of the straight leg in Tree and in most standing poses that involve a straight leg, I have moved away from the idea of â??engaging the quads,â?• as it can actually encourage the tendency to hyperextend a knee that already has that predisposition. Instead, I encourage students to engage the muscles around the entire circumference of the knee joint to bring evenness to the muscular support and stability of the knee (another way to think about this is â??to firm the knee jointâ?•). This was a wonderful image and idea that our teacher Donald Moyer used to employ regularly, and I have found to be of great benefit to those I have passed it onto in my classes. â??
Baxter Bell MD

Bent Leg

1. Press foot into thigh or shin of standing leg (but do not press into inner knee).
2. Press sole of foot and inner thigh against each other with equal pressure.
3. Open bent leg out to side.
4. Open inner thigh outward.
5. Draw top of outer thigh in toward hip.
6. Draw knee back.
7. Or, draw knee â??out and down.â?•
8. Drop hip of bent leg down to lengthen waist.

BACK OFF THE TURNOUT & FOCUS ON ALIGNING PELVIS

Often, when we try to turn out the lifted leg in tree pose, we end up taking the pelvis with us, destabilizing the pose. Keep in mind that this pose isnâ??t about how wide you can open your knee out to the side. Rather than trying to crank your lifted-leg knee open as much as possible (ouch!), back off the external rotation (turnout) in the beginning and focus on aligning your pelvis before you worry about how much your lifted leg is turned out. â?? Kat Heagberg

Torso

1. Keep hips parallel.
2. Draw navel gently in toward spine.
3. Keep pelvis neutral.
4. Keep pelvis pointing straight ahead.
5. â??Draw lower ribs back & down to lengthen low back and to align rib cage with pelvis.â?• (Joseph LePage)
6. Draw shoulder blades in and down (if arms are not raised).
7. Lift the chest. (Extend upper chest.)
8. Lift rib cage and chest.



9. Draw shoulders down away from ears.
10. Avoid rounding shoulders forward.
11. If arms are raised, stretch them upward, lengthening the torso.

STABILIZE THE CORE

Consciously engaging the [rectus abdominis](#) during one-legged standing poses thus helps to maintain balance. The [transversus abdominis](#) also contributes to stability. Activating the abdominal muscles increases [intra-abdominal pressure](#) and tightens the thoracolumbar fascia, thus lifting the torso and stabilizing the lumbar spine. Working with the abdominals also amplifies the mind-body connection to this region, creating a functional focal point. • Ray Long MD

Head, Face, Breath

1. Lengthen through crown of head.
2. Relax face.
3. Relax jaw.
4. Relax forehead.
5. Notice if breath stops flowing and return to breathing smoothly.
6. With each inhale, draw earth energy up the standing leg and allow entire body to lengthen. With each exhale, relax in the pose, without losing length or stability. • (Joseph LePage)
7. Inhale expand chest and feel lightness of upper body. Exhale ground down more.

Gaze

1. Focus eyes on a point at eye level.
2. Gaze at horizon.
3. Or focus on floor 10 to 15 feet ahead.

Imagery

A picture containing text, nature, plantDescription automatically generated

A FAVORITE TREE

The tree is a legend in all cultures. It reaches to universal heights in mythology becoming the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge, the Cosmic Tree. And it reaches right into the roots of our individual consciousness to our very personal histories with trees. When you do Tree Pose, allow a favorite tree to arise in your mind or see which tree memories want to speak. Find out what the tree wants to tell you about your life, about your knowledge, about your relationship to the cosmos. • Swami Lalitananda

WHAT EQUILIBRIUM MEANS

Rooted and Twistedâ?| Isnâ??t Yoga everywhere? We say that trees are the lungs of the earth. House of thousands of beings, old wise spirits always gazing at the same landscape, quietly and calmly observing the time passing by. They breathe and give us breath. Static and malleable, they are natureâ??s children who play to grow taller and taller, defying gravity while surrendering to it by giving away its roots to the earth. There is a light yet invisible energy rising from the deepest root up to the softest leaf. [Vrksasana] is the name Yogis choose to imitate them. It is a great pose to reflect what equilibrium means: â??a state in which opposing forces or influences are balanced.â?• Itâ??s a state of rest or balance due to the equal action of opposing forces. â?? Sherezade Ruano

Alanna Kaivalya Teaching Video

[4 min video](#)

A person posing for a pictureDescription automatically generated with low confidence

Baxter Bell Videos

[5 min, Three versions](#)



[3 min, Moving in and out of pose with the breath](#)

A picture containing floor, wall, indoorDescription automatically generated

[3 min, Eagle arms](#)



See Also

- Donâ??t miss the detailed teaching support in [Asana Category: Balancing Poses](#).
- [Yoga & Balance \(as a Theme\)](#)

Variations Summary

Many Reasons for Variations



Vrksasana can be challenging for many of us, particularly those who experience balance issues, tightness in our IT bands or inner thighs, or any type of injury to the knee, ankle, or foot. Practicing any of the following variations will allow you to explore similar shapes, actions, and benefits while respecting your individual needs. â?? Andrew McGonigle

Learn about reasons for balance issues and much more in [Asana Category: Balancing Poses](#).

Variations in the Bent Leg

Pick a foot position that will allow you to turn the bent knee out with more ease. â?? Olga Kabel

1. Foot at top of inner thigh
2. Foot lower on thigh
3. Foot on lower leg
4. Foot on lower leg, and shin resting on chair seat (with blanket); with this version, likely best to also practice with back near wall for balance support as needed; image from Jivana Heyman [here](#)
5. Foot on block
6. Toes on floor, heel at inner ankle
7. Foot at inner knee is contraindicated for knee issues; some traditions recommend always avoiding placing foot at inner knee; others recommend mindfulness if this placement is chosen to avoid pressing into the joint.

Placing the foot on a block â??decreases knee flexion for those with knee injuries, helps support equal weight distribution when youâ??re working on balance, can help with bone-strengthening for those with osteoporosis while minimizing the risk of falling or fracturing, and reduces the risk of internally rotating the hips and putting a strainful sway in the low back by having the foot further away from the body. â?? Jenny Clise

Variations in Arm Placement

1. Arms raised, shoulder-width apart, palms facing each other
2. Arms raised, palms together
3. Arms raised, hands clasped, index fingers extended
4. Arms in big â??Vâ?• above head
5. Hands in [Anjali Mudra](#) at the crown of the head
6. Hands in [Anjali Mudra](#) at the heart
7. [Eagle arms](#) (Baxter Bell demonstrates [here](#))
8. Hands to hips
9. One hand on wall or hip, one hand on thigh of lifted leg

Wall Versions

A picture containing floor, wooden, table, woodDescription automatically generated

1. Stand with side body less than an armâ??s length from wall, grounded leg closest to wall. Place hand at wall to support balance. Remove hand and return it to wall as needed.



2. Stand with side body to wall, bent leg closest to wall. Touch knee to wall for balance, as shown in image above.
3. Stand with back near wall and reach behind to touch wall for support as needed.

Other Challenging Versions

1. Close eyes.
2. Gaze up.
3. Lift heel, coming up on toes.
4. Stand on block.
5. Side bend to bent leg side. (Image and teachings by Adithi Mathews [here](#))
6. Sway.
7. Balance a block on the top of the head. ([source](#))

CHANNELING A TREE ISN'T ABOUT RIGIDITY BUT ABOUT A STABLE BASE FOR MOVEMENT

I used to think Tree Pose was a time when I should stand as rigidly as possible and try to look in control. But when one of my yoga teachers mentioned that tree pose is really about channeling a tree, suddenly the pose felt entirely different. Think about it this way: Trees are so strong because they are imperfect, and they let their branches go this way and that so that they can move with the wind. Once I raised my arms up and let them sway, I felt so much more powerful and alive in the pose. â?? Gina Tomaine

DESTABILIZING STANDING FOOT

Destabilizing the standing foot helps to tune into the steadying actions of the lower leg, so a foam block will be more challenging than cork or wood. Standing on a block, make your way into Tree Pose, taking care to ungrip your toes. Divide your weight evenly between the four corners of your standing foot: big toe and little toe mounds, inner and outer heel. Hug the outer ankle in to activate peroneus longus and lift the outer arch, maintaining the lift of the inner arch as you do so. The entire foot and lower leg should feel very active. â?? Jenni Tarma

Other Accessible Versions

1. Move in and out with the breath (as taught by Baxter Bell MD [here](#)).
2. From a chair, take one leg into a figure 4 position or to the side with foot on a block, arms lengthening up, as taught [here](#) and [here](#).
3. Utilize other chair variations: 3 chair versions taught by Jivana Heyman in 8-min video [here](#).
4. Lie on your back. Option: Press foot into wall. Andrew McGonigle teaches this [here](#) and Jenny Clise offers detailed instructions [here](#), including option of supporting bent leg with blanket under knee or thigh, and flexing foot of straight leg.

The supine variation â?? supports those who are working on balance, informs good spinal alignment, supports your knees and hips and reduces strain on the ankle of the straight leg, and takes weight off of foot and ankle for students with injuries. â?? Jenny Clise



Variation Photos

VrksasanaTree Pose

A person doing a yoga poseDescription automatically generated with low confidence
See [Verbal Cues](#) for instructions.

Arm VariationArms Wider

A picture containing sport, armDescription automatically generatedArms wider than shoulder-width.

Vrksasana â??

A person doing
Bring palms to

Arm VariationM

A person doing

Arm VariationNamaste at Heart

A person doing yogaDescription automatically generated with low confidence

Leg VariationB

Wall Support â?? Side BodyHand to Wall

A picture containing sportDescription automatically generated

Wall Support â?? BackOne Hand to Wall

A person jumping in the airDescription automatically generated with medium confidence A picture co

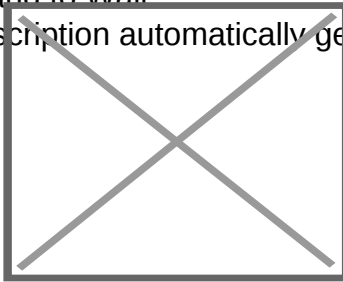
Wall Suppo

A picture co

Wall Suppo

A picture co

Partner PoseIntertwined Arms



Author

michaeljoelhall