



Urdhva Prasarita Padasana (Upward Stretched Legs)

Description



Urdhva Prasarita Padasana

â??urdhvaâ?• = upward

â??prasaritaâ?• = spread out

â??padaâ?• = foot

Upward Extended Feet Pose

- Known as Upward Extended Feet, Upward Stretched Legs, 30-60-90 Lifts, 60-30 Lifts, Leg Raises, Double Leg Raises, Leg Lifts, UPP and L Pose
- Dharma Mittra shows a version of this pose which he calls *Jatharasana* (Abdominal Lift Pose) in [Asanas: 608 Yoga Poses](#) 2003 p 330
- Some sources call this pose [Uttana Padasana \(Extended Leg Pose\)](#). However, that name also refers to a different pose that is practiced in Ashtanga Yoga after *Matsyasana*, and we use the name for that pose.

Heart of Pose

Core Strengthening

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

- Strengthens abdomen.
- Strengthens low back.
- Strengthens [psoas](#).
- Strengthens spinal ligaments and erector spinae muscles. (Rama Jyoti Vernon)
- Improves posture.
- Reduces fat.

Energy, Mood, Emotion

- Builds true inner strength. (Rama Jyoti Vernon)
- Inspires centeredness, serenity of mind.

Inner Body

- Strengthens both the autonomic and central nervous systems. (Rama Jyoti Vernon)
- Tones abdominal organs. (Geeta Iyengar)

Therapeutic Use*

- Relieves [gastric trouble](#) and flatulence. (B.K.S. Iyengar)

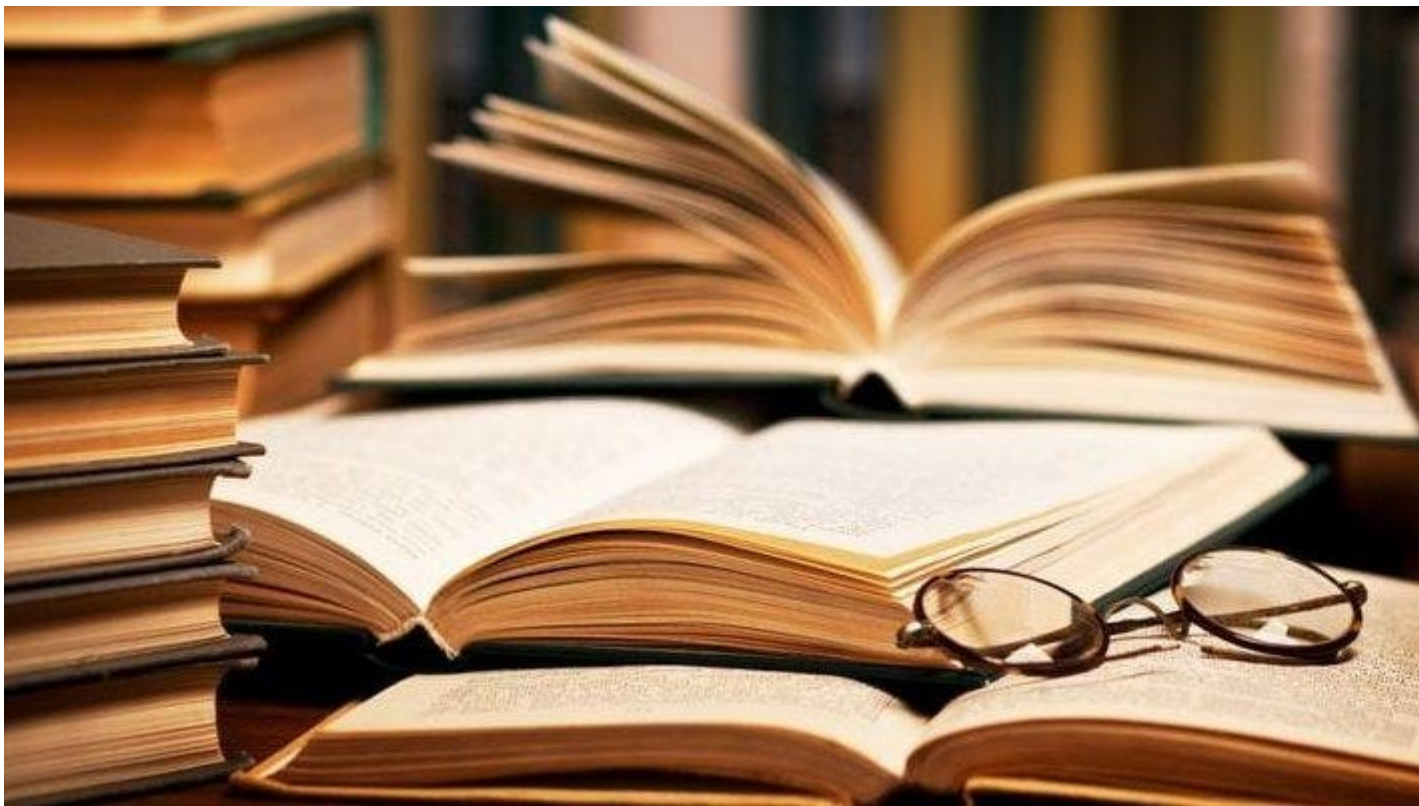
* Unless trained in yoga therapy, teachers are usually advised against prescribing particular *asanas* to address specific conditions. Instead, sequences that are well-rounded and intentional are generally considered therapeutic in nature. The uses listed above are often associated with this pose and may be helpful in choosing poses for a complete sequence.

More Benefits

This pose prepares the body for inverted poses. It teaches the proper way to use the abdominal muscles in harmony with the lower back. The pose can train you to distribute effort throughout your back, thus avoiding straining any region. — Mukunda Stiles

- Dr. David Frawley notes this pose naturally reduces *pitta* and *kapha* imbalances and strongly reduces *vata* imbalance.

Readings



STRENGTH IN THE DEEPEST CORE OF OUR BEING

If we are strong in the deepest core of our being, we will not have to armor ourselves by tightening the outer muscles. — Rama Jyoti Vernon

TONE ENTIRE ABDOMINAL REGION WHILE CORE BECOMES STABLE & STILL

When you work to develop core strength in yoga, the goal is not to isolate one part of the body, or just contract certain muscles. Instead, think of the core in relationship to everything else: your other muscles, your limbs, and even your mind. *Urdhva Prasarita Padasana* tones the entire abdominal



region—the front, the sides, and the deeper transverse muscles that cross the sides of the torso—and it does so by lengthening and extending the whole body. The two ends of your body—the arms and legs—are actively pulling in opposite directions, like a tug of war, but the center, your core, becomes stable and still. — Nikki Costello

MANY BENEFITS

Building your strength in this pose will build your stamina in standing poses. It will also strengthen your back and tone your abdominals. When you rotate your front thigh inward, you will activate your psoas muscles. — Eve Johnson

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

- [Low back injury](#)
- [Hip injury](#)

IF BACKACHE, PRACTICE APANASANA INSTEAD

Those with slipped disc and backache should avoid this [pose]. The muscles in the back are tensed in this asana and this will cause aggravation of any back complaints. They should do [*Apanasana* — Knees to Chest. She later describes the benefits of wrapping hands around legs and pressing.] — Geeta Iyengar

Cautions

- If there is existing back pain, be cautious.
- —With sciatica, keep your knees bent or, if it is acute, avoid the pose entirely.— (Mukunda Stiles)

Kyphosis



- In the case of Kyphosis (also called Hyperkyphosis or Thoracic Kyphosis), forward bending (spinal flexion) of any sort is contraindicated.
- [Neck, Shoulder & Upper Back Issues](#)

Sciatic Pain



- In the case of [sciatic pain](#), sometimes forward bends are completely avoided.
- Other experts recommend avoiding seated forward bends and those with a twisting component such as *Janu Sirsasana* (Head to Knee Pose).
- Generally, forward bends done on the back such as *Apanasana* (Knees to Chest) are considered safer.

Low Back Arching

- Watch out for anything more than a mild arching in the low back, as this can lead to back pain.

Teaching Cues

If there is arching, considerations include:

- Focus on pulling abdomen backward.
- Reduce hold time.
- Bend the legs.
- Begin by lifting only one leg at a time.

LOW BACK ARCHING

If your lower back arches during the pose, do not hold it for long. Shift the focus to pulling your abdomen backward. It may be helpful to place your hands under your hips to assist your abdominal strength. A mild arching of your lumbar spine during the lift and lowering of your legs is normal due to the contraction of the psoas muscles. If your legs tremble, relax the effort to straighten your knees, and allow them to bend to a level where shaking is minimized. The trembling can be due to weakness of your hip flexors or a tightness in your hamstrings. â?? Mukunda Stiles

Tightening Abs

- Watch out for tightening of the abdominals that interferes with smooth breathing.

AVOID TIGHTENING ABS & ARCHING BACK

If your psoas pair is weak, as it likely is, you can expect two things to happen as you swing your legs: One, you'll unconsciously assist the psoas by tightening your rectus abdominus; and two, your low back will arch away from the floor. Neither action is desirable. Tightening the abdominal muscle interferes with breathing, overworks your six pack, and also prevents the psoas from assuming its proper role in hip flexion; arching is an invitation to an oh-my-aching-back injury. — Richard Rosen

Strenuous Forward Bends



Strenuous forward bends in general are not advised in the following cases. These conditions indicate a need for particular care in choosing forward bend variations or alternatives, and promoting safe practice.

Pain

- Any case where pain is experienced during forward bending, including degenerative discs, low back strain or any acute injury.

Back Issues

- Disc Injury, recent or acute
- Disc Herniation
- [Osteoporosis of the thoracic spine](#)
- Spinal Stenosis, when instructed by healthcare provider to minimize forward bends.
- Spinal surgery, recent

More

- [Hamstring tendonitis](#), when there is pain in hamstrings during forward bending.
- Hernia or a abdominal wall separation if increased bulging in those areas is created by forward bending.

- [Pregnancy, 2nd & 3rd trimesters](#)

Basic Form & 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.

Set-Up



1. Lie on back with legs straightened and stretched out.
2. Alternatively, begin with feet flat on floor knees pointing up.
3. Reach arms to floor overhead.
4. Lengthen body.
5. Press low back toward floor for a neutral spine.
6. Engage abdominal muscles throughout pose.

Basic Form Versions

From the set-up position above, there are different ways the Basic Form is taught. (In addition to these basic form versions, youâ€™ll find [Alternatives & Variations](#).)

1. Hold at 90 Degrees â€™ Mukunda Stiles is one who instructs this version.
2. Lift and Lower â€™ Some sources teach this as a first step before lifting or lowering in stages. Some only teach this process. Rama Jyoti Vernon teaches this but if the lumbar arches and navel center isnâ€™t relaxed, she advises practicing only lowering â€™before attempting to lift them away from the gravitational field.â€™•
3. Lift in Stages â€™ Dr. David Frawley, Mira Mehta, and B.K.S. and Geeta Iyengar are some who teach this version.
4. Lower in Stages â€™ Christina Brown and Baron Baptiste are some who teach this version.

MAXIMUM EFFORT

The point of maximum effort in this movement is the initial lifting of the legs off the ground. The effort decreases as the legs move toward a perpendicular position. Therefore, restricting the movement to the initial part intensifies the effort involved. Note that this movement also places the back muscles under a lot of strain, and therefore the person must have strong back muscles before attempting it. Also, he must be very fit, as this is a strenuous exercise. â€™ A.G. Mohan

Hold at 90 Degrees



1. Inhale, lengthen legs; exhale, lift legs to 90 degrees.



2. Keep back of legs long and abdomen relaxed; continue to stretch arms.
3. Breathe and hold.

[In 90 degree position,] feel the strength of your quadriceps, and the muscles crossing the tops of your thighs to your pelvis (hip flexors), as well as the uppermost section of your arms (deltoids). There may be a great effort on the part of your abdominals to steady the pose. Lessen the intensity of stress there to give your hip flexors more challenge. Focus your attention on a comfortable, yet steady stretch of the calves and hamstrings, so our heel cords are lengthened. Your feet will be aligned as they are in Mountain Pose. â?? Mukunda Stiles

Lift & Lower Smoothly

1. Inhale, lengthen legs; exhale, lift legs to 90 degrees.
2. Keep back of legs long and abdomen relaxed; continue to stretch arms.
3. Exhale, lower legs smoothly and slowly back to floor.
4. While lowering, stretch arms and legs away from each other.
5. Do not let lower back lift.
6. Some sources teach to repeat this 5-12x.
7. â??The more slowly and controlled you can work, the better. Donâ??t hold the breath; keep it flowing steadily so your movement can be perfectly timed to the breath.â?• (Christina Brown

Lift in Stages

1. Exhale, raise to 30 degrees, hold.
2. Inhale, raise to 60 degrees, hold.
3. Exhale, raise to 90 degrees, hold.
4. Exhale, lower to floor, relax.
5. Keep extending low back away and keep it pressing down.

Lower in Stages

1. Lower to 60 degrees, hold.
2. Lower to 30 degrees, hold.

Verbal Cues

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

Legs & Feet



[In 90-degree position,] pull your hamstrings down toward your buttocks. Pull your front thighs toward your hip creases. Then, from the tops of your front thighs, near your hip creases, press toward the backs of your thighs. â?? Eve Johnson

1. Keep legs active.
2. Extend out through heels.
3. Press through balls of feet.
4. Stretch legs and feet.
5. Keep knees even and facing ceiling or facing forward, according to stage of pose
6. Press outer hips down.
7. â??Roll front thighs in.â?• (Eve Johnson)

Core

1. Draw abdominals in
2. Do not let back lift up
3. â??Keep the abdomen passive.â?• (Mira Mehta)
4. â??Relax the navel center, keeping the abdomen hollowâ?• (Rama Jyoti Vernon)
5. â??Do not let chest collapse.â?• (Mira Mehta)

Head, Neck & Torso

1. Gaze: tip of nose.
2. Stretch from hips to fingertips.
3. Keep neck lengthened.
4. Keep back of neck relaxed.
5. Relax face, jaw, eyes.

Shoulders, Arms & Hands

1. Keep shoulders relaxed, drawing down from ears.
2. Palms up.
3. Elbows straight.

More

1. Avoid holding breath.
2. â??While moving legs, if breath stops, stop the movement.â?• (Rama Jyoti Vernon)

USING EXHALATION FOR UP & DOWN MOVEMENTS

Sometimes people will inhale the legs up and exhale them down. However, to deeply strengthen the nervous system and prevent overarching and compression of the lumbar spine, I highly recommend using the exhalation for both movements. This helps to keep the navel area passive and relaxed, sinking back toward the spine. This in turn lengthens and strengthens the lumbar spine. â?? Rama Jyoti Vernon



Alternatives & Variations

Lifting Variations

- Raise and lower legs without pauses or holds.
- Rather than going through 30, 60 and 90 degrees progressively, practice one position and then rest before the next.

Hand Placement

- Place hands under sacrum.
- Palms to floor by hips.

One Leg Version (Eka Pada Urdhva Prasarita Padasana)

- Lift one leg at a time.
- Lift one leg with foot of other flat on floor.
- Place sacrum on block. Take hands to wall. Lift one leg at a time. (Jill Miller)

Props

- Place a block between feet.
- Place a strap around feet.
- Press feet into wall.
- Press buttocks and legs against wall. ([Viparita Karani](#) variation with arms overhead.)
- Place hands around the leg of heavy furniture.

Other Variations

- Hands behind head, lower one leg down to one foot above floor; lift head & shoulder blades off floor, exhale contract belly, pulse torso up 10x, keeping shoulder blades lifted; in this version, no need to flatten back, according to Baptiste (Baron Baptiste)
- Exhale â?? [Apanasana](#) w/ palms down by hips >> Inhale â?? *Urdhva Prasarita Padasana* w/ arms overhead, legs to 90 degrees (This found in Gary Kraftsow teachings)

For Tight Hamstrings

BLOCK BETWEEN FEET

People with flexible hamstrings can easily bring their thighs past 90 degreesâ? if itâ??s no work at all to hold your legs up,â? move them further away from your face until you feel your abdominal muscles engage. If youâ??re in the tight hamstring camp, you wonâ??t be able to bring your straight legs to 90 degrees, so youâ??ll feel the abdominal work right awayâ??usually far too intensely to be able to pay attention to how your legs are working. The solution: lie down and find the distance from the wall where your heels can press into the wall and your legs can be straight with a strong and yet workable hamstring stretch. Then place the brick between your feetâ? With a block between your feet, you can



intensify the action of the legs, the same actions that happen in every standing pose in which the legs are parallel. â?? Eve Johnson

A Different Alternative or Preparation

Srivatsa Ramaswami* shows and describes poses with similar but not the exact same Sanskrit name. (We can find no other sources that use the same names but you may find these variations useful nonetheless.)

- From supine position, inhale to take only right arm overhead.
- Exhale to lift right arm and right leg as high as possible, toward 90 degrees. Hold.
- Inhale to release back down.
- Exhale to lift right arm and left leg. Hold.
- Inhale to release back down.
- Exhale to lower right arm back down by hips.
- Repeat with left arm lifting.

After the above steps, Ramaswami teaches the traditional 90 degree position (a letter â??Lâ?• shape) followed by both arms and legs lifting (a letter â??Uâ?• shape). This is then followed by clasping big toes.* Yoga for the Three Stages of Life 2000 p 132 and The Complete Book of Vinyasa Yoga 2005 p 116

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