



Eka Pada Rajakapotasana (One Legged King Pigeon)

Description

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana



Sleeping Swan



Eka Pada Rajakapotasana

aa-KAH pah-DAH rah-JAH-cop-poh-TAHS-anna

â??ekaâ?• = one

â??padaâ?• = foot

â??rajaâ?• = king

â??kapotaâ?• = pigeon

One Legged King Pigeon Pose

Sleeping Swan

The common variation of extending back leg and folding forward is called *â??Sleeping Swanâ?•* in Yin Yoga

Versions I, II, III & IV



In Light on Yoga, *Eka Pada Rajakapotasana I* is the first in a series with Versions II, III and IV placing the front leg in different positions.

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana II

Foot of front leg on floor just in front of hip, knee forward of heel

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana III

Front leg is in [Virasana](#) (Hero)

Eka Pada Rajakapotasana IV

Front leg straight forward as in [Hanumanasana](#) (Monkey)

Heart of Pose

- Hip Stretch (leg position)
- Backbend (full pose)

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](#)

Energy, Mood, Emotion

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

- Calming while backbend is also uplifting

Energetically, many of us hold grief, fears, and control issues in our hips. To create emotional comfort, release resentments, or ease the “stuck” thought patterns of worry, try adding pigeon pose to your practice. Zo Newell

Inner Body

Inner body effects may include the following.

- Stimulates organs in abdomen
- Said to impact glands and affect the autonomic nervous system
- Said to stimulate Liver and Kidney energy lines which pass through the inner groin; the Stomach and Spleen meridians via the back leg; and the Gall Bladder line on outer leg

In its full expression, kapotasana impacts all the organs and glands between the thighs and the brain—the testes, ovaries, uterus, bladder, kidneys, spleen, pancreas, heart, liver, lungs, colon, the entire gastrointestinal tract, and the thymus, thyroid, pineal and pituitary glands. Each of these plays a crucial role in our overall health and well-being! Kapotasana also affects the [autonomic nervous system](#) (ANS), especially the [vagus nerve](#), a major player in the parasympathetic branch of the ANS, and all of the many organs that are under the jurisdiction of the vagus nerve. This is how kapotasana opens the door to an extraordinary level of self-mastery over our involuntary functions, especially those housed in the pelvis. Sandra Anderson & Pandit Rajmani Tigunait

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

It requires a combination of stability and mobility—as well as total presence. Carrie Owerko

Lower Body

- Stretches thighs, groin and abdomen
- Stretches the deep glutes, rotators in hips and buttocks
- Lengthens [psoas](#) and other hip flexors (on back leg side)
- Increases external range of motion of femur in hip socket (of front leg)

Upper Body



- Full pose opens chest, shoulders and neck

Therapeutic Uses

- Can help prepare for backbends and seated postures.
- Can release a tight piriformis, which is often a factor in [sciatic nerve pain](#)• (Zo Newell)
- Helps to counter the effects of both active exercise or training, and excessive sitting, both of which tighten hips and glutes.

Can you just sit? I don't mean in a chair; can you sink gracefully to the floor or a cushion, fold your legs under you, and sit cross-legged with ease and stability? If this simple action creates a sense of gripping discomfort in your hips, you might find that pigeon is just the pose you need! Our bodies aren't really designed to spend long periods of time on car seats, couches, or office chairs. Yet we spend a great deal of time sitting with our legs and feet below our hearts, our bodies folded at the hips, and our weight well back behind our sit bones! *Eka pada raja kapotasana*! provides an antidote to many of the actions of prolonged chair-sitting. Zo Newell

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

- Ankle injury
- [Knee injury](#)
- [Sacroiliac joint injury](#)



Knee Cautions

- The closer the front leg moves toward a 90-degree bend, the more pressure that is placed on the knee. If the hips are tight, the knee can be put at risk. Lessen bend in front knee as needed.
- While a common teaching is that flexing the front foot will protect the front knee from rotating unsafely, this tends to only be true when the shin is at a 90-degree angle such as in [Agnisthambasana \(Fire Log Pose\)](#). When the angle of the knee is less than 90-degrees, it's generally best to keep the foot pointed while flexing the toes back.

RISKY ASANA FOR KNEES

Note that this is among the riskiest asanas for the knees. It is vitally important to have the hip of the front leg firmly grounded on the floor or a block while keeping the back leg extended straight back from the hip, knee pointed straight down, thigh internally rotating, and that side of the pelvis rotating forward. — Mark Stephens

KEEP KNEE HAPPY

The knee is happiest—and most well protected—when the shin and thigh are aligned. While you want your foot and ankle to remain active, don't feel obligated to flex the foot to make that happen. Instead, choose to point, floint [foot pointed, toes flexed back], or flex, based on whatever position will keep your knee happy. — Rachel Scott

Sacrum Cautions

- Keep hip bones parallel to decrease chances of putting sacrum in unsafe position and to increase low back safety.
- However, keeping the hip bones parallel does not mean hips need to be squared to front. See [Variations](#) for an option that teaches this.

Folding Forward Cautions

- Folding forward can put additional stress on front knee and on sacrum.
- While folding forward, it may also be more tempting to —collapse,—• further increasing risk in the pose.

AVOID COLLAPSING

It is important not to collapse into this pose. The pelvic floor, hamstrings, and gluteals should act eccentrically to distribute the weight created by the force of gravity through the whole base of the pose rather than drop right into the hamstring attachment or knee joint. — Leslie Kaminoff

More Teaching Considerations



- For some students, the pose may be a good one for them but practicing in a group class without individual instruction and care can mean they practice it unsafely and inadvertently cause harm to their knees, sacrum or low back.
- And some students would be better served by practicing variations and alternatives that are safer for their bodies.
- When teaching the pose from Downward Facing Dog Pose, please see the cues in [Verbal Cues: Basic Form](#) to help students safely manage this transition.

See Also

- [Pigeon: Verbal Cues](#)
- [Pigeon: Variations](#)
- [Hip & Leg Stretches](#)

Basic Form

Set Up



1. Begin in [Adho Mukha Svanasana \(Downward Facing Dog Pose\)](#).
2. Lift a leg and bend the knee up to chest before bringing leg forward. This puts the focus on rotation at the hip, not the knee. (Curvy Yoga)
3. As you bring the leg forward, avoid going into a Lunge from which you must work the foot over to the side. (Yoga International)
4. Rotate the hip to turn leg and foot to side, placing the top of foot down.

Moving Into Pose



1. Keep weight evenly in hand as if in [Chaturanga Dandasana \(Four-Limbed Staff Pose\)](#).
2. Avoid placing too much weight on knee and leg.
3. From here, with toes of back leg tucked, take that leg back, moving hips back.
4. Drop knee, prop hip of bent knee side, and stay here.
5. Or, take front knee more parallel to front of mat.
6. Bend back knee to bring foot toward head.
7. Inhale, lift arm.
8. Exhale, bend elbow, reach to inside of foot. Pause.
9. Then reach back with second hand to grasp outside of foot. Draw sole of foot toward head.

See Also

- Yoga International [4-minute video](#)
- [Variations](#) for a different way to enter and practice the pose: â??Z-Sitâ?• and â??Donâ??t Square Hips.â?•

Alignment Adjustments



The following steps can help with alignment:

1. Tuck toes of back leg; lift thigh and knee; keep leg long.
2. Move hip of back leg forward as needed so that hipbones are parallel.
3. Draw hip of forward leg â??back and in toward midline of your body; its natural tendency will be to swing forward and out away from you.â?• (Natasha Rizopoulos)
4. Set leg back down.

Backbending Alignment

Anatomy of Backbending

- Judith Lasater explains that in backbending, the tailbone lifts (called nutation) as a result of top of sacrum moving into body. • Tucking • the tailbone is the opposite of this action and therefore makes backbending more difficult. Instead, if nutation is allowed to happen naturally, backbends feel better.
- In The Max Factor, anatomy expert Roger Cole advises that those with tight hip flexors may benefit from contracting glutes in backbending while those with open hip flexors are usually best relaxing glutes.
- In 5 Steps to Safer Backbends, Doug Keller provides expert anatomical information and guidance in how to support backbending by engaging lower abdominals.

WHEN BODY IS IN STRAIGHT LINE VS WHEN BENDING

[Tadasana](#) requires that the pelvis be locked into a stable, unmoving position at the SI joints in order to maintain the stillness and steadiness of the posture. This is accomplished by slightly scooping the tailbone down and forward • an action called counternutation, which causes the top of the sacrum to tip slightly backward. Counternutation does not generally apply if the body is in motion; it is specific to [Tadasana](#) and other postures (such as [Parsvakonasana](#)) in which the body is meant to be in a single straight line from the heels through the crown of the head.

<https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/standing-support-1.jpg>

When you bend backward or forward, however, the opposite action takes place in the sacrum: the top of the sacrum automatically nods forward beyond its neutral position, and the tailbone shifts slightly backward. <https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/standing-support-2.jpg>

Studies show that this sacral nutation in spine-bending poses stabilizes the sacrum within the pelvic bones in a more secure and less vulnerable position than counternutation, where, particularly with backbending, you may be more at risk of pinching the tissues within the SI joints, forcing the SI joints into misalignment, or otherwise straining or jamming your low back. • Doug Keller

Verbal Cues

Back Leg

This *asana* has a unique base of support: the back surface of the front leg and the front surface of the back leg. This same base, with the knee joints extended, would almost be [Hanumanasana \(Monkey / Splits\)](#). • Leslie Kaminoff

1. Avoid externally rotating back leg; instead, keep it neutral.
2. Press midline of back leg down (to avoid external rotation).
3. Avoid allowing hip of back leg to hover in the air. • Lower and roll • that hip down toward floor and send it forward. (Jill Miller)
4. Lengthen groin of back leg by drawing hip of back leg forward.

5. Keep back leg pointing straight back; avoid allowing it to slide away from midline. [Note that while this is a traditional teaching, see [Variations](#) for a version where the front leg is at a right angle but the back leg is allowed to straighten only as possible.

RAY LONG'S ANATOMICAL EXPLANATION

Contract the gluteus maximus to extend the hip. Note that engaging this muscle also externally rotates the femur. We want to internally rotate it in Pigeon Pose. Do this by engaging the gluteus medius and tensor fascia lata. The cue for this is to press the back thigh and knee into the mat and attempt to drag it out to the side (abduct it). The mat will constrain the knee so that no abduction will actually occur; however, this engages the gluteus medius and tensor fascia lata and internally rotates the femur. â?? Ray Long

Front Leg

Maintain the ankle in a neutral or slightly dorsiflexed position, extend the toes and then press the ball of the foot forwardâ?|. These actions create a type of dynamic â??braceâ?• on the outside of the leg, protecting the inside of the knee. Similarly, the outside of the knee is protected from over stretching. â?? Ray Long

1. See The Daily Bandha link above for more detail on the anatomy of those actions.
2. To assist in flexing and externally rotating the thigh, contract the [psoas](#) and its synergists â??by pressing down on knee while attempting to lift it off the ground; observe how the psoas tilts the pelvis forwardâ?| and straightens the lower back.â?• (Ray Long)
3. When folding forward, keep weight back in hip.
4. To intensify, move front ankle more toward front of mat, moving the shin toward parallel with front mat.
5. To lessen intensity, take front ankle more toward groin.

WHEN KNEE ISN'T AT RIGHT ANGLE: POINT THE FOOT, FLEX THE TOES

The cue, â??Flex your front footâ?• [in this pose] is problematic unless your front shin is 100% parallel to the front of the matâ?|. Sickling is when the big toe points inward, and the weight/pressure shifts to the pinky toe side of the footâ?| [which] puts the ankle and knee joints at greater risk of injury. In pigeon, if your shin isn't parallel, but your front foot is flexed, odds are that youâ??re sickling. What to do/teach instead? Point the foot but flex the toes back (some people call this â??flointing,â?• a flex/point hybrid of sorts) to bring the foot into a more neutral position. â?? Kat Heagberg

More

1. When hands are grounded, keep weight evenly pressing.
2. Lift torso away from thigh.

Variations

Propped Version

Hands to Blocks



Use blocks to lessen backbend. Align hands beneath shoulders

â??Sleeping Swanâ?• Version

Fold Forward



More Variations & Adaptations See [Variations](#) for many more considerations.

Author
michaeljoelhall