



Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend)

Description

Paschimottanasana

Intense Stretch of the West

Also known as: Seated Forward Bend

Heart of Pose

Stretch Back Body

Effects / Benefits

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

- Stretches and rejuvenates entire back of body.
- Traction and lengthens spine.
- Opens sides of ribs and latissimus dorsi.

Energy, Mood, Emotion

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

- Cooling, soothing, calming.
- Promotes a feeling of peace.



- This *asana* is also one that is used for the practice of [brahmacharya](#). (Swami Sivananda Radha)

Inner Body

Inner body effects may include the following.

- Tones kidneys, adrenals and liver.
- Stimulates reproductive system.
- Improves digestion.
- Improve circulation in ankles, feet, legs, knees, hips, low back, spine, between vertebrae, torso and neck.

THE FREER THE SPINE IS, THE BETTER

The spine is the “freeway” to your brain, or the freeway from your brain to the entire body. The freer it is, the less congested, the better. Nerves throughout the body have their origin in the spinal cord. As they are freed and fed, nourished and healed, you will experience more vitality. As the spine and backside of the body is being stretched, the front side is firmed and toned. Erich Schiffmann

BENEFITS OF HEART LOWER THAN SPINE

The spines of animals are horizontal and their hearts are below the spine. This keeps them healthy and gives them great power of endurance! In *Paschimottanasana* the spine is kept straight and horizontal and the heart is at a lower level than the spine. A good stay in this pose massages the heart, the spinal column and the abdominal organs, which feel refreshed and the mind is rested. Due to the extra stretch given to the pelvic region, more oxygenated blood is brought there and the gonad glands absorb the required nutrition from the blood. This increases vitality, helps to cure impotency and leads to sex control. Hence, this *asana* was called *Brahmacharyasana*. B. K. S. Iyengar

SUBDUES EGO AND QUIETS MIND

In this extreme extension of the back of the body the ego becomes subdued and the mind quiet. Silva Mehta

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.

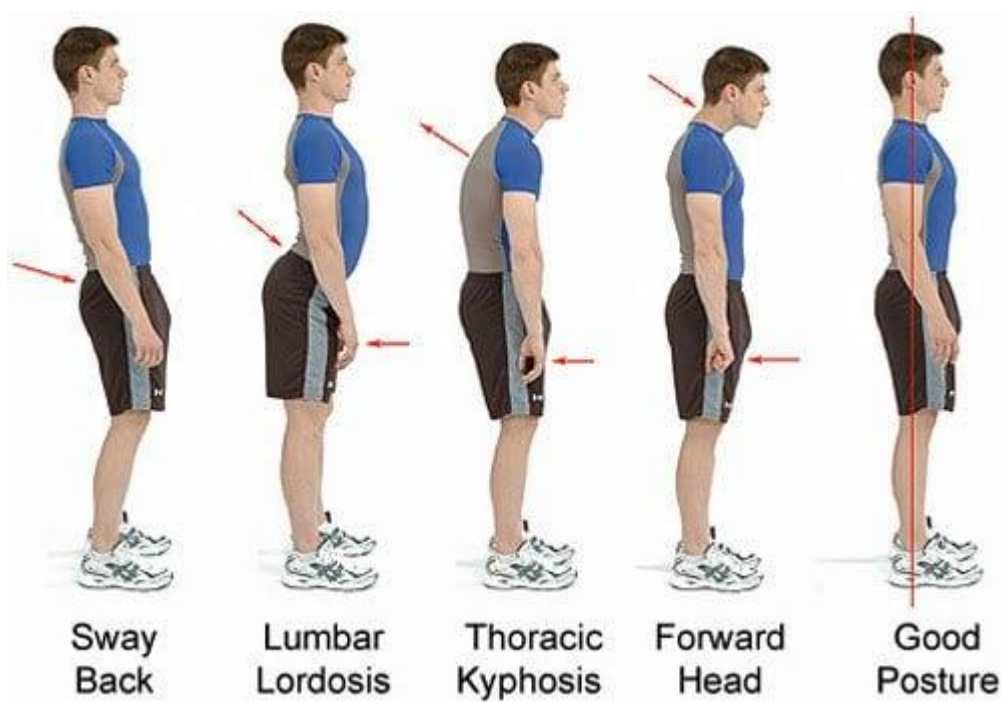
Contraindications

- Back pain affected by forward bending.

Cautions

- As in all forward bends, bending at the waist can strain the back; instead, hinge from hips and extend spine.
- As in all forward bends, take caution that variations are used when needed to keep hamstrings and low back safe.
- See also: [Asana Category: Forward Bends](#).

Kyphosis



- In the case of Kyphosis (also called Hyperkyphosis or Thoracic Kyphosis), forward bending (spinal flexion) of any sort is contraindicated.
- [Neck, Shoulder and 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.

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 an abdominal wall separation if increased bulging in those areas is created by forward bending.
- [Pregnancy, 2nd and 3rd trimesters](#)

Basic Form

Set Up



1. Begin sitting tall in [Dandasana \(Staff Pose\)](#).
2. Keep feet together or hip-width.
3. •Wriggle buttocks backward so you are on the tips of the sitting bones.â• (Erich Schiffmann)
4. Keep sit bones evenly grounded.

Moving Into Pose



1. Take hands forward to feet, legs or strap.
2. Alternatively, place fingertips on floor outside of hips as shown.
3. Rotate pelvis forward.
4. Hinge forward from hips while keeping spine in neutral.
5. Reach chest forward. •Lead with your sternum. If you had a flashlight in the middle of your chest it should be shining on the toes.â• (David Swenson)

To Emphasize



- Keep pelvis rotated forward.
- Stretch both sides of torso.
- Lift low back and low abdominals up and in.

Variations Summary



Prop Variations

1. Prop sit bones.
2. Prop under knees.
3. Strap around feet.
4. Blocks outside of lower legs for hands.
5. Squeeze block between ankles.
6. Chair against wall; sit on edge, send feet out until legs are straightened; release into forward bend.
7. Brace feet against chair; take hands to chair.
8. Bolster on legs; release forehead to prop.

Wall and Other Variations

1. Bend knees.
2. Wrap forearms under knees.
3. Soles of feet pressing into wall; hands to floor or wall.
4. Sit bones at wall, bolster behind low back; strap at feet.
5. Balancing on sit bones (or on back; sources differ), hold feet, draw feet/legs toward torso ([Urdhva Mukha Paschimottasana](#)).
6. See [Photos](#).

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.



Hips and Torso

1. Keep pelvis rotated forward.
2. Stretch both sides of torso.
3. â??Spine moves up toward head and forward toward the floor.â?• (Dr David Frawley)
4. â??Move pubis back to bring hips closer to thighs.â?• (Silva Mehta)
5. Release glutes away from each other.
6. Lift low back and low abdominals up and in.
7. Lengthen belly forward. (Dr David Frawley)
8. Draw shoulder blades down back
9. Relax shoulders

Extend the spine and try to keep the back concave. To start with the back will be like a hump. This is due to stretching the spine only from the area of the shoulders. Learn to bend right from the pelvic region of the back and also to extend the arms from the shoulders. Then the hump will disappear and the back will become flat. â?? B. K. S. Iyengar

Continue to deepen your sacrum toward your front body as your shoulder blades drop down your back and find their muscular connection with your sacrum. This action continues to support and elongate your front body, so as you turn inward and fold deeply, your front body is not compressed. â?? Rodney Yee

Legs and Feet

1. Keep feet and ankles together (or hip width).
2. Pull outer thighs up to keep legs from rolling outward.
3. Keep kneecaps pointing up and inner edges of feet vertical and parallel. (Erich Schiffmann)
4. Activate (contract) quadriceps.
5. Squeeze thighs together by engaging adductors.



6. Roll thighs inward.
7. Press femurs to backs of legs. (Miriam Austin)
8. Press knees downward.
9. Spread toes.
10. Stretch tops of feet away from legs so ankles are not rigid. (Silva Mehta)
11. Send heels and balls of feet forward, while drawing arches back. (Silva Mehta)
12. Keep heels moving ahead and toes pulling back. (David Swenson)
13. •Be aware of the outer edges of your feet. There is a tendency for them to roll in. If you push through from the base of the big toes it will help to alleviate this and also keep the ankles active. (David Swenson)

Energize the leg lines by firmly pressing the back of the thighs down and extending heels away from you, lengthening the achilles tendon keep toes spread and press the ball of each foot away from you. Press through the inner edge of each foot so your legs spiral inward slightly, and direct the line of energy outward through your legs in the direction they are pointing. Do not strain as you do this. Create the perfect degree of intensity not too much, not too little. Erich Schiffmann

More

1. In full pose with hands clasping feet, reach elbows out away from each.
2. Keep back of head relaxed.
3. Keep head in line with spine.
4. Keep neck soft.
5. Draw chin in.
6. Inhale, lift chest and extend spine; exhale, release more deeply.
7. Keep focus on drawing chest up and forward rather than taking face to legs.
8. Questions for self-reflection: What is holding me back? What are the restrictions in my life? What helps me release? What do I need to surrender or renounce? (Swami Sivananda Radha)

When you first attempt this pose, especially if your hamstring muscles are tight, do so with low current in your leg lines. Have your legs relaxed, even bent, but keep the inner edges of your feet parallel, and your toes spread. Erich Schiffmann

Variation Photos

Basic Propping

Prop Hips + Strap to Feet



Variation

Forearms Under Bent Knees



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

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