



Parsvottanasana (Pyramid Pose)

Description

Parsvottanasana

pars-VOH-tah-NAS-ahna

â??parsvaâ?• = flank or side

â??uttanaâ?• = intense stretch

Intense Side Stretch Posture

Also known as: Pyramid Pose

Heart of Pose

- Balance
- Asymmetrical Forward Bend

Notes

- Challenging pose; requires concentration.
- Balance is challenged due to narrowness of base, need for outer hip muscles to be both long and active, and inability to use eyes to help with balance. (Leslie Kaminoff)
- See [Cautions](#) for low back, hamstrings and knees.

See Also

- [Asana Categories](#)
- [General Alignment Principles](#)



- [Alignment Cueing](#)

Effects / Benefits

Energy, Mood, Emotion

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

- Requires and develops steadiness, concentration and clarity.
- Can steady and "cool" the mind.
- Can bring a sense of vitality from deep physical and energetic release in adductors and hamstrings.

Inner Body

Inner body effects may include the following.

- As a forward bend, abdominal organs are "toned" and "massaged."
- Improves circulation, especially in the head. (Erich Schiffmann)

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.

- Strengthens and stretches legs, groins, back and shoulders.
- Deeply stretches adductors and hamstrings.
- Hips may free up from opening of hamstrings.
- Develops balance.
- Develops stamina.
- Reveals and corrects asymmetries in spine, waist, hips and legs.

Therapeutic Uses*

- [Flat Feet](#)
- [Scoliosis](#) (when adapted by yoga therapist for individual student)

* 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

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

This pose generally not recommended for students with these conditions:

- [Back injury](#)
- Glaucoma
- [Hamstring injury](#)
- [Heart disease](#)
- [High blood pressure](#)
- [Pregnancy](#)
- [Sciatica](#)
- [Stroke](#)

Kyphosis

<https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/bad-posture-types.jpg>

- 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.

Important Variation

<https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/parsvottanasana-standing-wall-press-S>

For back injury, tight hamstrings, and/or to practice without inverting, consider *Ardha Parsvottanasana* at the wall as shown.

Other Options

- Rather than folding over front leg, extend spine at an angle or straight (parallel to floor) with hands on blocks or fingertips to floor.
- Bend front knee as needed.



BACK & HAMSTRINGS

For back problems and tight hamstrings it is important to work with a straight spine. Place hands on the wall or a counter (at waist or hip height) to keep the back straight as you work the pose. — Dr. David Frawley

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

Set Up

<https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Pyramid-parsvottanasana-virabhadrasana>

1. Start in [Tadasana](#) (Mountain).
2. Step one foot back about 3 feet (or a leg's length or greater). Turn back toes out 45°. (Some sources say 30°.)
3. Square hips forward.
4. Exhale and bind arms (or keep hands at hips in preparation for raising above head).

Classic bind: *Paschima Namaskarasana* (Reverse Namaste)



Alternative: clasp opposite arms or wrists as shown

Moving into Pose

https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/parsvottanasana-Pyramid_Hands_Bloc

Inhale

1. Look up, lift chest, press sternum up.
2. Keep belly button pressing back to spine.
3. Open shoulders. (Or raise arms beside ears.)

Exhale

1. Lead with chest to fold over front leg.
2. Keep legs straight and hips level.
3. Press outer edge of back foot and inner edge of front.
4. Alternative as shown in photo: Keep chest lifted, extending crown of head away from tailbone.

Drishti (Gaze)

- Nose

Hold Time

- 5 breaths

Coming Out

- Inhale to come back up

To Emphasize

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

1. Draw hip of forward leg back to keep hips even and level.
2. Root back heel firmly down.
3. Stretch belly button and heart toward floor.
4. Beginners: align torso over inner side of thigh.
5. Advanced students: rotate torso to align over midline of thigh. (Yoga Journal)

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.

Consider Avoiding: Square Hips

This cue is mainly an issue in poses when the back foot is planted on the floor at a 45-degree angle and the general orientation of the pose is toward the short edge of the mat. Here's why this is problematic: When the back foot is fixed in this position, if you pull your hips forward in an attempt to square them, you end up torquing the knee ouch! Kathryn Heagberg

Instead, Heagberg explains:

- Stabilize back leg by aligning knee with second and third toe. Ground down through back heel.
- Then, use belly to bring torso more forward. Wrap back-leg side of belly toward the front-leg side.
- And honestly, if the hips aren't perfectly squared to the front of the room, it's okay, really! When it comes down to it, it's way more important to keep the knees healthy than it is to have your pelvis totally square. (Kathryn Heagberg)

SQUARE THE CHEST

One of the many things I learned from Turzi (and shared in [this article](#)) is that when our legs are doing different things, the two sides of the pelvis should also be doing two different things—which means they aren't quite "squared" toward the front of the room, or even level from side to side! Now when I teach a pose like crescent with the right leg forward, instead of saying "Square the hips toward the front of the room," I say, "Square the chest toward the front of the room." I then add that the right side of the pelvis, as it moves into a slight posterior tilt, is higher (i.e., closer to the shoulders) and further forward, while the left side of the pelvis is lower and further back in a slight anterior tilt. It's been surprisingly easy to cajole students into moving the two halves of the pelvis independently, since this subtle work pays off right away in obvious core engagement. Amber Burke

Lower Body

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

Legs

1. Keep legs straight and stable. (Bend front knee if necessary.)
2. Keep legs strong.
3. Reach quadricep of front leg backward.
4. Avoid leaning too much weight onto front leg.
5. Draw inner thighs toward each other.
6. Do not push knees backward. (Dr. David Frawley)



Feet

1. Press into outer edge of back foot.
2. Press into big toe side of front foot.

Hips & Pelvis

1. Draw outer hip of back leg forward.*
2. Draw outer hip of front leg backward.*
3. Feel an evenness that allows you to balance a cup of tea on your pelvis.*
4. One way to square pelvis: Lift onto toes of back leg and draw that hip forward until even with other side; then lower heel back down.*
5. Deepen crease at top of hips.

*Please see: [Common Problems in Alignment Cueing for Standing Poses](#)

Torso, Shoulders, Arms

1. Draw belly button over front leg.
2. Lengthen spine from base of spine to crown of head.
3. Squeeze shoulder blades toward each other.
4. With traditional bind, lift elbows away from back while pressing palms together.

BIND

[With traditional bind], open and lift the sides of your chest as you roll the outer corners of your shoulders back and rotate your inner biceps out. â?? Marla Apt

Neck, Head, Face

1. Relax neck.
2. Let head hang.
3. Relax forehead and face.
4. Breathe steadily.

Imagery

1. Keep spine spacious.
2. Form a long line of energy from base of spine through crown of head.
3. Invite front body to lighten and expand.
4. Imagine the spine floating gently and lightly on the ocean.
5. Allow the mind to quiet and cool.
6. Settle in and breathe steadily.

SPIRALS



Notice the two intertwined rotations, or spirals, in the front leg: the primary spiral, which you have to do to get into the pose, and the counterspiral, which you add in order to balance the pose and bring your awareness inside. The counterspiral doesn't destroy the primary spiral; it wraps around it! The primary spiral is the external spin at the head of the femur, which takes the outer edge of the hip joint back; the counterspiral is the internal spin that grounds through the inner edge of the foot and the root of the big toe! Once both are set, you squeeze them into each other. — Richard Freeman

Variations

Bind Variation

Clasp Opposite Elbows

Pyramid_Elbows.jpg

If the traditional bind isn't accessible or causes discomfort in elbows or wrists, try clasping opposite elbows.

Ardha Parsvottanasana

At Wall

Standing_Vary_at_Wall.jpg

Take hands to wall at shoulder height. Press hands into wall to lengthen spine.

More Variations & Adaptations

See Variations for many more considerations.

Author

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