



Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose)

Description

Ardha Matsyendrasana

A person sitting on the floorDescription automatically generated with medium confidence

Paripurna Matsyendrasana

A picture containing text, person, outdoorDescription automatically generated

Ardha Matsyendrasana

ARE-dah MOT-see-en-DRAHS-anna

â??ardhaâ?• = half

â??Matsyendrasanaâ?• = Lord of the Fishes*

Half Lord of the Fishes Pose

In [Bikram Hot Yoga](#), called Spine Twisting Pose

Paripurna Matsyendrasana

â??paripurnaâ?• = complete, full

Complete Lord of the Fishes Pose

Naming Mythology

The pose name derives from this story: [Shiva](#) came out of a deep meditation and began to share the teachings of yoga with his wife, Parvati. In the water nearby, a fish took notice and listened to the

teachings. Once he noticed the fish who he realized had learned yoga, Shiva blessed the fish with the name Matsyendra, the Lord of the Fishes. The fish then came onto the shore, took divine form, and arranged himself into a seated twist that allowed him to fully absorb the teachings.

Heart of Pose

- Twist

Joint Actions

The following are from Leslie Kaminoff's book, Yoga Anatomy.

- Spinal rotation, neutral extension
- Top leg: deep hip flexion, adduction, internal rotation; knee flexion
- Bottom leg: moderate hip flexion, adduction, external rotation, knee flexion
- See also: [Joint Movements & ROM](#)

Notes

Paripurna vs Ardha Matsyendrasana*

- *Paripurna Matsyendrasana* - Lower leg in [Half Lotus](#); bind to foot of top leg
- *Ardha Matsyendrasana* - Other variations, including foot of lower leg under sit bones or beside hip, binding around upper knee to clasped hands, or binding foot

* Source: B.K.S. Iyengar, [Light on Yoga](#) 1975 p 164

Ayurveda Perspective

Dr. David Frawley notes that the pose reduces *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* while Joseph LePage says standing twists are more indicated for *kapha*.* (See also: [Ayurveda: Doshas](#))

- *Vata*: Moderate holding, focus on grounding, stillness and breath
- *Pitta*: Any holding, focus on non-efforting, easy grounding and breath
- *Kapha*: Any holding, focus on lifting and breathing (or use standing twists instead)

* Joseph LePage, Yoga Teachers' Toolbox [link](#) 2005 p 43, Dr. David Frawley, Yoga for Your Type 2001 p 182 [link](#)

Effects / Benefits

Musculoskeletal

Musculoskeletal effects may include the following.



- Opens rib cage and chest.
- Stretches shoulders, hips, back, and neck.

USE AWARENESS

Many people find [Ardha Matsyendrasana] rejuvenating, yet as we twist we put ourselves into a physically stressful position. The key is awareness. Can you use awareness to transform anxiety into concentration? Just a little twist and your world can change. â?? Swami Lalitananda

COMPARISON TO MARICHYASANA III

By the practice of [Ardha Matsyendrasana,] one derives the benefits mentioned under [Marichyasana III](#). But here as the range of movement is more intensified, the effects will also be greater. In *Marichyasana III* the upper part of the abdomen is squeezed. Here the lower part of the abdomen has the benefit of the exercise. â?? B.K.S. Iyengar

Energy, Mood, Emotion

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

- Balancing: invigorating/rejuvenating, as well as calming.

Inner Body

Inner body effects may include the following.

The pressure of thigh against abdomen massages the internal organs and promotes their healthy functioning. â?? Christina Brown

- â??Massagesâ?• digestive organs.
- Stimulates liver and kidneys.
- Stimulates [lymph and immune system](#).
- Releases breath.

Therapeutic Uses*

- Assists [digestion and elimination](#).

* This pose is often associated with positive effects related to the conditions listed. But unless trained in yoga therapy, teachers are usually advised against â??prescribingâ?• particular *asanas* to address specific conditions.

Contraindications & Cautions

Contraindications

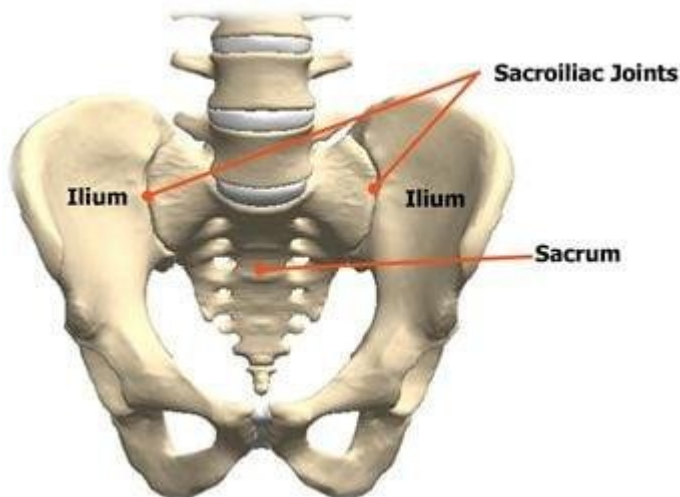
This pose generally not recommended for students with these conditions:

- Back or [spinal injury](#)
- Osteoporosis ([Baxter Bell MD](#))
- [Pregnancy](#)

Low Back Pain

- If there is [low back pain](#), avoid strenuous twists.
- Instead, practice milder twists with care, which can be helpful when there is low back tension.
- Learn more [here](#).

SI Joint Issues



- Many advise against twists for sacro-iliac (SI) joint issues.
- Others suggest varying seated twists by moving twisting side buttock forward a couple of inches.
- See more: [SI Joint Issues](#) and [Category: Twists](#).

Basic Form

Set Up

A person sitting on the floorDescription automatically generated with low confidence

1. Begin in [Dandasana \(Staff\)](#) or [Sukhasana \(Easy Pose\)](#).
2. Sit upright and focus on lengthening the spine. Imagine you are creating space between between the vertebrae.



3. If in *Dandasana*, bend knees to slide feet in toward body.

Moving Into Pose

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1. Slide one foot to floor outside of opposite hip (heel touching hip).
2. Take second foot over top of opposite thigh so it's just outside the opposite knee.
3. Clasp knee with both hands.
4. Press sit bones and grounded foot to even pelvis and lengthen spine.
5. Stretch arm (on same side as lower leg) upward.
6. Without losing the torso length, rotate toward lifted knee.
7. Take second hand to floor or prop behind sit bones.
8. Choose option: 1) clasp knee, 2) take elbow to outside knee, or 3) take shoulder across knee and reach along outside of lower leg to clasp big toe or inner edge of foot.

While most sources teach foot of bottom leg to side of hip, these masters teach the following:

- Silva Mehta & B.K.S. Iyengar teach inner heel under buttock on same side and toes under opposite buttock; edges of foot are parallel; edge (not top of foot) is on floor.
- Dr David Frawley teaches placement of sit bone on right arch.

To Emphasize

A person sitting on the groundDescription automatically generated with medium confidence

- Keep sit bones down.
- Press grounded foot into earth.
- Keep torso lifting.
- Allow heart center to be spacious.
- Broaden back muscles.

Verbal Cues

Hips & Legs

1. Keep sit bones down.
2. Press grounded foot into earth as though trying to stand on it. • (Mark Stephens)
3. When clasping lifted knee, focus on releasing outside of hip. (Rodney Yee)
4. Keep grounded knee pressing down.

Torso & Arms



MOVING INTO FULL POSE

[When moving into full pose,] reach armpit to outside of thigh! flush against the bent knee, with no space between armpit and knee. Clear chest past the thigh. Then grasp foot, taking the fingers under the outer side of the foot. Keep arm straight. Internally rotate the inner side of the elbow inward so as not to hyper-extend the elbow. Beryl Bender Birch

1. If elbow at knee, fingers pointing straight up.
2. Grounded hand is as close to center line of body as possible. (Joseph LePage)
3. If back hand is on floor, fingers of hand point back.
4. If back hand is binding, touch grounded thigh or grip inner thigh.
5. Keep shoulder blades drawing down back.
6. Keep torso lifting.
7. Keep torso moving closer to leg.
8. Allow heart center to be spacious.
9. Press into grounded palm to open chest and heart.
10. Draw ribs outside upper leg to create space for the lungs. (David Swenson)
11. Broaden back muscles away from spine. (Rodney Yee)

Head & Neck

- Avoid over-twisting neck.
- Keep chin parallel to earth.
- Gaze over back shoulder.

More

1. Inhale, release twist a little, lifting chest and lengthening spine.
2. Exhale, gently squeeze lower abdomen in toward spine, deepening twist.
3. Turn from base of spine.
4. Use elbow and knee to push against each other to enhance depth. (David Swenson)
5. Keep breath steady.
6. While in the twist, you can reflect on such questions as What can help me remain straight and centered even in challenging or stressful work situations? Or, Can I look beyond myself and my own concerns to see a bigger picture? (Swami Lalitananda)

TURNING ATTENTION AWAY FROM STRESS & TOWARD A RESET

Ellen O'Brien: This pose asks me to engage with my core and the back of the room offering me a new perspective. When I turn my gaze toward the back of the room, I often think about turning my attention away from any stress or anxieties I'm holding onto. This pose always gives me the reset I need. Yoga Journal

CREATING A POINT OF LEVERAGE

Whenever you have one part of the body fixed against another, as with the outside of the top-leg ankle against the thigh of the bottom leg, a point of leverage is created. Pressing the top-leg ankle against the thigh can be used as a cue for internally rotating the hip. Pressing the ankle against the thigh eccentrically contracts the stretching abductors, internally rotating the hip—a desirable effect in this pose. — Ray Long

SENSITIVITY & CARE, ESPECIALLY WITH FULL BIND IN PARIPURNA MATSYENDRASANA

If we force ourselves into [the twist], the spine will twist where it always has, where it needs the twist the least. In this pose, it is particularly easy to force the body while attempting to reach around the back and grab the shin. To the extent that the desire to do this comes from the ego's urge to satisfy itself — just to prove we can do the pose — it manifests itself as force. Feeling, on the other hand, allows us to tune in to the habitual tendencies of the body and sense which vertebrae are twisting and which are not. Cultivating feeling in [the pose] allows movement where there was stagnation, release where there was stiffness, and freedom where there was bondage. Only through intense inner sensitivity can the pose be done safely. — Aadil Palkhivala

Baxter Bell Videos

4-min Demonstration



4-min, Hands Free Variation

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See Also

More teaching instructions to consider:

- Allison Ray Jeraci [link](#)
- Andrew McGonigle [link](#) (particularly for accessible variations)
- Aadil Palkhivala [link](#) (particularly for binding)
- Lara Warren [link](#)

Don't miss the detailed teaching support in [Asana Category: Twisting Poses](#).

Variations Summary



More Accessible Versions & Variations

1. Prop sit bones with a blanket or a block to keep hips level
2. Back hand can ground on block
3. Clasp hands around lifted knee
4. Clasp around lifted knee with strap to span distance between hands
5. Hook elbow around knee, forearm & fingers parallel to ground
6. Take elbow to outside of lifted knee, forearm & fingers pointing straight up
7. Strap around grounded ankle, stretched over lower thigh; back hand reaches around back to strap
8. Placed grounded foot to inside of knee rather than outside
9. Extend grounded leg rather than bending knee

More Variations

- *Paripurna Matsyendrasana* ??? Lower leg in Half Lotus; bind to foot of top leg
- Bind under lifted knee
- Bind over top of lifted knee; clasping hands behind back



- Extended grounded leg; place other leg in half lotus; reach opposite hand to outside of extended foot (twisting that direction) with second hand around back to bind to lotus leg

Variations

Ardha MatsyendrasanaCommon Intermediate Version

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See [Bas Form](#) for instructions

Less TwistNeutral Gaze

A person doing yogaDescription automatically generated with medium confidence

Instead of turning neck, keep a neutral gaze.

Full BindWith Propping

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Arm Wraps Around KneeArm Variation

A person squatting on a yoga matDescription automatically generated with low confidence

Propping Hips and Back HandSit on Prop, Back Hand to Block

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Prep PoseLengthening

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To remove the challenge to the bottom leg, consider Marichiyasana 3 as an alternative.

Marichyasana IIIAlternative

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Seated TwistAlternative or Preparation

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Seated Twist Using Chair BackChair Yoga

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See [Cha](#)

Standing Twist at WallWith or Without Chair

A person sitting on a chairDescription automatically generated with medium confidence



Seated Twist at Wall Hands to Wall

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Reclined Twist Many Versions

A person lying on a yoga mat Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Restorative Twist Another Twisting Variation

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See [Restorative Yoga](#).

The wall help to encourage action of and provide support for added le

See [Jath Parivarta](#)

Sequencing & Pose Progression

Preparation

Before you attempt any twisting pose, warm up properly. Prepare with some gentle asanas that bring blood into the muscles that flex and extend the spine, such as Cat-Cow.

Consider these poses to prepare for *Ardha Matsyendrasana*.

- [Cat-Cow Flow](#) â?? Warms up the spine and stretches chest
- [Parsvottanasana \(Pyramid Pose\)](#) â?? Stretches hamstrings and sides of torso, and â??teaches you how to extend your legs and stabilize your hips while aligning your head and tailboneâ?• ([Lara Warren](#))
- [Garudasana \(Eagle Pose\)](#) â?? Prepares hips, utilizes twist requiring stabilization
- [Parighasana \(Gate Pose\)](#) â?? Stretches abdominals and the sides of torso
- [Janu Sirsasana \(Head to Knee Pose\)](#) â?? Stretches hips and hamstrings with mild twisting action
- [Gomukhasana \(Cow Face Pose\)](#) â?? Prepares hips
- [Marichyasana III](#) â?? Twisting actions
- [Bharadvajasana I \(Bharadvajaâ??s Twist\)](#) â?? Twisting actions

See more in [Asana Category: Twisting](#)

Pose Progression

#1 Outer Hip Opening

<https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ardha-matsyendrasana-prep-outer-hip-s>



#2 Add Twist

https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Half_Lord_of_Fish_Leg_Extended.jpg

#3 Intermediate Version

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

#4 Full Bind

https://yogateachercentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ardha-matsyendrasana-Half_Lord_of_F

Neutralizing, Countering

NEAR THE END OF PRACTICE

I look forward to doing Ardha Matsyendrasana toward the end of my practice,â• says Yoga Journal contributing editor Gina Tomaine. â•It allows me to feel like my whole body is being wrung out, after Iâ•ve been energized and warmed up from previous poses. â• Yoga Journal, Half Lord of the Fishes Pose

Some considerations for neutralizing and countering include:

- A symmetric forward bend such as [Baddha Konasana \(Bound Angle Pose\)](#) or [Paschimottanasana \(Seated Forward Bend\)](#)
- A mild backbend such as [Bhujangasana \(Cobra Pose\)](#) or [Setu Bandhasana \(Bridge Pose\)](#) can stabilize sacrum and integrate effect of twists.
- [Savasana \(Corpse Pose\)](#)

Inspiration

THE IMPORTANCE OF LENGTH

Depth in twisting asanas is achieved by creating length. â• David Swenson

TO ADDRESS ASYMMETRY, BEGIN ON MORE DIFFICULT SIDE

Itâ•s not uncommon to find *Ardha Matsyendrasana* easier on one side than the other, generally because most of us tend to favor our dominant arm, so we donâ•t use our bodies symmetrically. This lopsidedness can be even more pronounced in people who practice one-sided twisting activities, like golf or tennis. To help even out postural imbalances, begin on the more difficult side and do the pose twice there or hold it twice as long. â• Carol Krucoff



RELAXING & SOFTENING

Beginning students often become rigid in this pose. But a key to the asana is being able to relax into the twist. Be sure to keep your gaze soft—or even close your eyes—as you focus on your breath and feel the pose relax slightly on inhalation and deepen on exhalation. Concentrate and enjoy the deep stillness of the pose. And like the great fish *Matsyendra*, you may find yourself transformed. â?? Carol Krucoff

POETIC INSPIRATION

Allow your belly to recede and flow into the space between your spine and your right thigh. Drop your hip downward, like water seeping into a crack, as your chest rises, like steam from the fires of your solar plexus. â?? Rodney Yee

MYTHOLOGY: MATSYENDRA

The story of the fish *Matsyendra* highlights the virtues of concentration and stillness—and offers a parable for the transformative power of yoga. According to the ancient tale, the Hindu deity Shiva was on an island, explaining the mysteries of yoga to his consort Parvati. A fish near the shore remained motionless and listened with rapt attention.

When Shiva realized that the fish had learned yoga, he blessed it as *Matsyendra*, Lord of the Fishes. The fish then took a divine form, came on land, and assumed a seated spinal twisting posture that allowed him to fully absorb the teachings.

Yogic lore credits this twist, called *Paripurna Matsyendrasana* (Complete Lord of the Fishes Pose) with such important benefits that it is one of the few asanas described in a seminal 14th-century manual on yoga called the [Hatha Yoga Pradipika](#). This classic guide anoints *Matsyendra* as the first human teacher of hatha yoga and says that the posture dedicated to him fans the gastric fire, cures all diseases, and awakens kundalini shakti, the dormant feminine energy coiled at the base of the spine in the form of a serpent. *Ardha Matsyendrasana* (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose) is a milder version of this twist. â?? Carol Krucoff

ENERGY VISUALIZATION

Visualize a spiral of energy moving up from the sit bones to the crown, with the spine in the center of the spiral. With each inhalation, draw energy up this spiral, lengthening the spine, and with each exhalation, twist energetically from the base of the body to the crown. Feel the deep stillness that comes into the brain, spinal cord, and nervous system as you relax deeply in the twist. â?? Joseph LePage

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