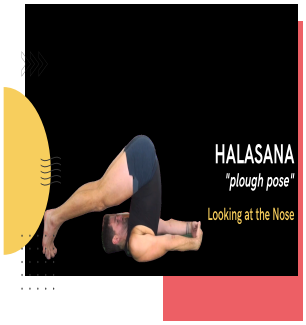

Halasana

Description

Halasana is one of the restorative poses that is usually performed near the end of the practice. It is also an inversion. Thus, it has beneficial effects on the cardiovascular system and the flow of cerebral spinal fluid.

HALASANA (11 movements)

ASTAU Exhale, lower feet, bind

Anatomy

We finish the series with Halasana (Plough Pose) and Shoulder Stand (Sarvan- gasana). Like other inversions, these postures can affect the autonomic nervous system by stimulating pressure receptors located in the aorta and carotid arteries. This can result in a temporary lowering of the heart rate and blood pressure. BothHalasana and Shoulder Stand have a calming effect on the body and mind and help to prepare for deep relaxation in Savasana. Like Headstand, they stimulate the nerves associated with the fourth, fifth, and sixth chakras. Note that this series follows the order for Headstand and Shoulder Stand that is advocated by the Iyengar Yoga tradition. In the classical Ashtanga system, the Shoulder Stand precedes Head- the stand. Both systems have similar benefits in relation to the autonomic nervous system and chakras. Try each method to find what works best for you.

Synergizing/Activating

- The biceps flex the elbows. This causes the hands to press into the back, lifting and supporting it while opening the chest.
- The posterior deltoids extend the humeri toward the floor, further lifting the back.
- The quadratus lumborum and psoas combine to lift and stabilize the lower back.
- The psoas and pectineus flex the hips.
- The adductor longus and brevis draw the thighs toward the midline.

- The quadriceps extend the knees.
- The tibialis anterior dorsiflexes the ankles.
- The peroneus longus and brevis evert the ankles and open the soles of the feet.

Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) is a clear liquid that circulates in the subarachnoid space surrounding the brain and spinal cord and throughout the ventricular system of the brain. It serves as a mechanical cushion against trauma and distributes nutrients and neuroendocrine factors, such as endorphins, to various parts of the central nervous system. Inverting the body alters the flow of CSF, bathing the brain in endorphins and improving circulation to regions of stagnant flow.

Inversions and the Cardiovascular System Inverting the body affects blood flow, increasing the return of blood from the torso and lower extremities through the inferior vena cava to the heart. The heart pumps more efficiently when the chambers are filled optimally and cardiac output increases. Oxygenated blood is pumped out of the heart through the aorta and distributed to the body. The aorta and carotid arteries have pressure receptors that aid in regulating blood pressure, maintaining the mean arterial pressure within a narrow range. These receptors respond to increased cardiac output or blood pressure by signaling the brain to increase parasympathetic outflow. This results in a slowing of the heart rate and a lowering of the blood pressure. Conversely, when the blood pressure is low (hypotension), signals from the baroreceptors decrease, with cardiac output and blood pressure rising. The net effect is homeostatic balancing of the cardiac output and blood pressure. Inverting the body in persons with normal blood pressure increases the firing of the baroreceptors, thus increasing parasympathetic outflow (from the vagus and glossopharyngeal nerves). The result is a temporarily lowered heart rate and blood pressure. Always come out of inversions slowly to avoid light-headedness. Childâ??s. The pose is excellent for re-equilibrating the bodyâ??s hemodynamics following inverted poses. Persons with blood pressure problems, including hypertension hypotension, or glaucoma, should always consult their physician before practicing inversions such as headstands or shoulder stands.

Preparation

1. Exhale and jump or step through from Dog Pose to Dandasana.

2. Inhale, pressing down through the hands and engaging the accessory muscles of breathing to expand the chest in Dandasana.

3A. Exhale and roll back over into Halasana. Flex the elbows by contracting the biceps and press the palms of the hands into the back. Lean back slightly into the hands to open the chest forward and support the lumbar. Hold Halasana for five deep breaths.

4. Exhale and roll back over into Dandasana.

5. Inhale deeply, lifting and expanding the chest in Dandasana.

6. Exhale and lift the torso and swing (or step) back through the arms into chaturanga.

7. Inhale into Upward Dog.

8. Exhale into Downward Dog. Hold this pose for five deep breaths and then repeat the flow, adding the next pose.

3B. Roll over into Halasana and then exhale and lift the legs into the Shoulder Stand. Lean back into the hands and contract the biceps to bend the elbows; press the hands into the back and open the chest forward. Leaning back into the hands has the added benefit of taking the pressure off the cervical spine. Maintain the pose for five breaths in the beginning; build up to holding it longer with practice. Exhale down and back into Halasana; inhale and then exhale to roll out into Dandasana. Follow the flow as described on the previous page.

3C. Roll over into Halasana and then walk the feet around to the side, taking Parsva Halasana, the turning version of Plough Pose. Note that the feet will be uneven, with the outside foot further away from the body. Bend the knee to bring this foot in line with the inside foot; fix it on the mat and then straighten the knee. Note how this balances the pelvis. Repeat on the other side and then roll back into the Vinyasa Flow.

3D. Come up into Shoulder Stand from Halasana and then flex one hip to take Eka Pada Sarvangasana (One-Legged Shoulder Stand). Press the hands into the back and expand the chest. Then create a bandha by engaging the psoas on the side of the flexing hip and the gluteus maximus on the side with the leg in the air. This stabilizes the pose. Hold for five breaths and then return to Shoulder Stand. Repeat on the other side. Return to Halasana and then enter the flow.

3E. Lie down in Savasana. Place a folded blanket under the head to support it with the neck in a neutral or slightly flexed position. This is a gentle form of jaland-hara bandha. You can also place a bolster under the knees, as shown. Let the arms and legs fall out to the side and turn the palms to face upward. This aids in passively opening the chest. Close your eyes and sink into the floor. Completely relax and let go. Stay in Savasana for five to ten minutes or more if you have time.

Author
michaeljoelhall