



Standing Forward Fold - Uttanasana

Step 1

Stand in Tadasana, hands on hips. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints, not from the waist. As you descend draw the front torso out of the groins and open the space between the pubis and top sternum. As in all the forward bends, the emphasis is on lengthening the front torso as you move more fully into the position.

Step 2

If possible, with your knees straight, bring your palms or finger tips to the floor slightly

in front of or beside your feet, or bring your palms to the backs of your ankles. If this isn't possible, cross your forearms and hold your elbows. Press the heels firmly into the floor and lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling. Turn the top thighs slightly inward.

Step 3

With each inhalation in the pose, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend. In this way the torso oscillates almost imperceptibly with the breath. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the upper back, between the shoulder blades.

Step 4

Uttanasana can be used as a resting position between the standing poses. Stay in the pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute. It can also be practiced as a pose in itself.

Step 5

Don't roll the spine to come up. Instead bring your hands back onto your hips and reaffirm the length of the front torso. Then press your tailbone down and into the pelvis and come up on an inhalation with a long front torso.

Contra indications and Cautions

Back injury: Do this pose with bent knees, or perform Ardha Uttanasana (pronounced ARE-dah, ardhā= half), with your hands on the wall, legs perpendicular to your torso, and arms parallel to the floor.

Modifications and Props

To increase the stretch on the backs of the legs, stand in the forward bend with the balls of your feet elevated an inch or more off the floor on a sand bag or thick book.

Deepen the Pose

To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, lean slightly forward and lift up onto the balls of your feet, pulling your heels a half-inch or so away from the floor. Draw your inner groins deep into the pelvis, and then, from the height of the groins, lengthen your heels back onto the floor.

Preparatory Poses

Adho Mukha Svanasana

Janu Sirsasana

Paschimottanasana

Supta Padangusthasana

Follow-up Poses

Standing poses, inversions, or seated forward bends.

Beginner's Tip

To increase the stretch in the backs of your legs, bend your knees slightly. Imagine that

the sacrum is sinking deeper into the back of your pelvis and bring the tailbone closer to the pubis. Then against this resistance, push the top thighs back and the heels down and straighten the knees again. Be careful not to straighten the knees by locking them back (you can press your hands against the back of each knee to provide some resistance); instead let them straighten as the two ends of each leg move farther apart.

Benefits

Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression

Stimulates the liver and kidneys

Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and hips

Strengthens the thighs and knees

Improves digestion

Helps relieve the symptoms of menopause

Reduces fatigue and anxiety

Relieves headache and insomnia

Therapeutic for asthma, high blood pressure, infertility, osteoporosis, and sinusitis

Partnering

A partner can help you encourage the backs of your legs to open. Perform Uttanasana, resting your buttocks against a wall with your heels 6 to 12 inches away from the wall. Bend your knees. Have your partner press firmly against your sacrum. Imagine that the sacrum is sinking into your pelvis and lengthening through the tailbone, which in turn is growing up the wall. Slowly straighten your knees against this resistance. Don't simply lock the knees back to straighten them; instead, resist the back knees slightly forward as the heads of the thigh bones and heels move apart.

Variations

Padangusthasana

After bending forward, slide the index and middle finger of each hand in between the big toe and second toe of each foot. Then curl the fingers under the bottom and around the big toe and wrap your thumb around your fingers. With an inhalation straighten your arms and lift your front torso away from your thighs, making your back as concave as possible. Hold for a few breaths, then exhale and lengthen down and forward, bending your elbows out to the sides.

References - Yoga Journal Asanas