



Half Lord of the Fishes Pose - Ardha Matsyendrasana

Step 1

Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you, buttocks supported on a folded blanket. Bend your knees, put your feet on the floor, then slide your left foot under your right leg to the outside of your right hip. Lay the outside of the left leg on the floor. Step the right foot over the left leg and stand it on the floor outside your left hip. The right knee will point directly up at the ceiling.

Step 2

Exhale and twist toward the inside of the right thigh. Press the right hand against the floor just behind your right buttock, and set your left upper arm on the outside of your right thigh near the knee. Pull your front torso and inner right thigh snugly together.

Step 3

Press the inner right foot very actively into the floor, release the right groin, and lengthen the front torso. Lean the upper torso back slightly, against the shoulder blades, and continue to lengthen the tailbone into the floor.

Step 4

You can turn your head in one of two directions: Continue the twist of the torso by turning it to the right; or counter the twist of the torso by turning it left and looking over the left shoulder at the right foot.

Step 5

With every inhalation lift a little more through the sternum, pushing the fingers against the floor to help. Twist a little more with every exhalation. Be sure to distribute the twist evenly throughout the entire length of the spine; don't concentrate it in the lower back. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then release with an exhalation, return to the starting position, and repeat to the left for the same length of time. Watch a video demonstration of this pose.

Contra indications and Cautions

Back or spine injury: Perform this pose only with the supervision of an experienced teacher.

Modifications and Props

It's often difficult at first to get the torso snug against the inner thigh. Position yourself a foot or so away from a wall, with your back to the wall; the exact distance will depend on the length of your arms. Exhale into the twist and reach back for the wall. Your arm should be almost but not quite extended (make sure you aren't sitting too close to the wall, which will jam the shoulder). Push the wall away and move the front torso against the thigh.

Deepen the Pose

If you have the flexibility in the hips and spine you can bring the upper left arm to the outside of the upper right thigh. With the legs in place, exhale and turn to the right. Lean slightly back, away from the upper thigh, and bend the left elbow, pressing it against the outside of the upper right thigh. Then snuggle the torso in against the thigh and work the left upper arm further on to the outer leg until the back of the shoulder presses against the knee. Keep the elbow bent and the hand raised towards the ceiling. Lean into a slight upper-back backbend, firming the shoulder blades against the back, and lift the front torso through the top sternum.

Preparatory Poses

Baddha Konasana

Bharadvajasana

Janu Sirsasana

Supta Padangusthasana

Virasana

Follow-up Poses

Paschimottanasana

Janu Sirsasana

See also Gate Pose

Beginner's Tip

In this version of the pose, the opposite-side arm is wrapped around the outside of the raised-leg upper thigh. This may be impractical, and potentially harmful, for beginning students. Be sure to sit up well on a blanket support and for the time being just wrap your arm around the raised leg and hug the thigh to your torso.

Benefits

Stimulates the liver and kidneys

Stretches the shoulders, hips, and neck

Energizes the spine

Stimulates the digestive fire in the belly

Relieves menstrual discomfort, fatigue, sciatica, and backache

Therapeutic for asthma and infertility

Traditional texts say that Ardha Matsyendrasana increases appetite, destroys most deadly diseases, and awakens kundalini.

Partnering

A partner can help you work the opposite-side elbow to the outside of the upper thigh. Get your legs in position as described above and turn to the right. Have your partner sit to your right side, a foot or so away, facing you. Extend your left arm toward your partner, pressing the back of your arm against the top of the right thigh. Your partner can grip your wrist and, at the same time, press his/her feet against the outside of your right thigh. Gently pushing with the feet and pulling with the hands, your partner can draw the left side of your torso out of the inner left groin while you slide the back arm further along and tuck your left side more fully against the top thigh. Remember, though, that your partner shouldn't force you into a deeper twist, but is merely helping you to lengthen and extend.

References - Yoga Journal Asanas