

Neural Training through Handstand – A Guide

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Yoga, adho mukha vrksāsana,
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The paper gives some of the health benefits of the handstand (adho mukha vrksāsana) and informs on one of the ways how handstand can be safely learned in order to bring its full benefits.

Introduction

Handstand was for a long time considered to be an extreme position with no extra benefit if compared with headstand. Then headstand was also considered to be a risky *āsana*, as the neck vertebrae were heavily loaded. But recently, the handstand reappeared, with the extra benefit of not pressurizing the neck, leading to stronger arm, shoulder and back muscles and giving the brain a wealth of fresh blood and thus nutrients plus the act of balancing causes a lot of new neuronal connection to appear. This is beneficial also for practices like *prāṇāyāma* and meditation.

Whether you are an inversion junkie or a total newbie to the act of balancing on your hands, this simple to follow tutorial is a safe way to overcome the major obstacle in handstand and that is the natural fear of falling.

If you break down the key elements of this spectacular *asana*, you can build up strength and confidence to eventually produce a freestanding Handstand (*adho mukha vrksāsana*, *viparita vrksāsana*) which became a very frequently taught position (see Iyengar 1976; Jeraci 2017).

In my classes I teach this posture over a 10-week course plan. I feel extremely rewarded in watching students' progress. The energy levels change and the excitement of the students and myself can be felt. It's such a wonderful empowering posture. It builds strength in the shoulders, arms and wrists and it improves your sense of balance.



About the author

Rebecca's love and passion for yoga started about 20 years ago. At the age of 29 she was diagnosed with stage 4 bowel cancer and secondary liver cancer. She spent two years in and out of hospitals, aggressive chemotherapy and radiotherapy and numerous lengthy operations. Rebecca Papa-Adams is currently the longest survivor of stage 4 bowel cancer in the UK.

It was yoga that had become a massive factor in Rebecca's survival of cancer. At present Rebecca is active as a BWYQ level 4 teacher and she spreads the awareness of cancer through social media. Her email address is rebeccayoga@me.com.

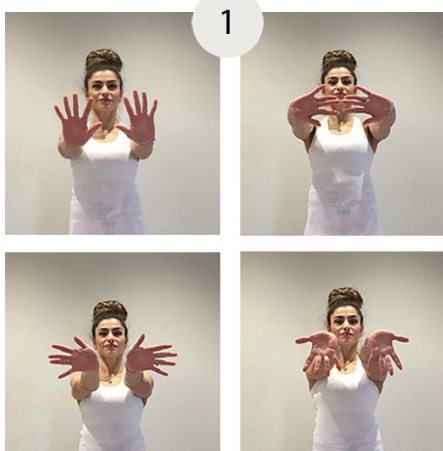
I. Warming and Preparing the Body

1 Wrist Strengtheners

Arms at shoulder height. Extend the hands at the wrists, repeat 5 breaths in each (Fig. 1).

- Fingers pointing up towards the ceiling
- Fingertips touching
- Fingers turning outwards
- Fingers turning down to the floor
- Repeat the above with arms overhead

Repeat with arms behind.



2 Shoulder Stretches and Strengtheners with a Block

Squeeze the block with the base of the insides of the knuckles, concentrate on pulling the upper arms back and the shoulder blades back and down (Fig. 2). On the breath slowly taking the arms towards the ceiling. Spend a little time here. A phrase I use with my students... "shaking is good". Then repeat with the block behind and yes squeeze!



3 Shoulder Stretches with a Belt

Hold the belt roughly a little wider than shoulder width: Straight arms reach up to the ceiling; right upper arm to ear; draw left arm back and down. Repeat to the other side stretching the muscles of the chest, then moving the arms back in space, hovering at a place of intensity (Fig. 3).



4 Spinal Mobilization in Cat and Wrist Strengthening

From neutral cat (hands under the shoulders, knees under the hips, feet in line with the knees) draw the body weight back and lift the heels of the hands and then begin to move forwards and back on the breath. Plant the heels of hands down lightly (Fig. 4).

Extension and flexion of the spine in Cat/Cow on the breath: Inhale rotate the pelvis away take the movement through the spine, chin gaze up.

Exhale tuck the tail bone under, chin to the chest. Repeat 3 times.

Side stretch: On the breath keep the feet the knees still draw the right hip and the right shoulder together, making a banana shape with the body. Strengthening the side waist. Repeat 3 times on both sides.

Spinal rotation: Take the right hand to the center of the pose, on the breath lead with the left elbow towards the ceiling then float the left hand up. Exhale lower down. Repeat 3 times on both sides.



II. Mastering the Handstand

5 Spinal Mobilization in Downward Facing Dog (parvatāsana)



6 Abdominal Strengthening

From long cat, draw right knee to chin, abdominals draw inwards as in cat head down, lift the toes to max! Repeat 3 times on both sides (Fig. 6).

Right knee to right elbow. Repeat 3 times on both sides.



7 Stages Towards Handstand at the Wall

From neutral cat, toes untucked and touching the wall, move into Downward Facing Dog.

Bring the right knee to the chest, then take the heel up towards the wall into Three Legged Dog. Repeat to the other side.

Walk both legs up the wall making an L-handstand at the wall. Hips above the hands, feel in line with the hips.

Take one leg up towards the ceiling. Repeat on the other side (Fig. 7).



8 Get Over the Fear of Kicking Up!

Place a pillow or a bolster at the wall, head against the support. One leg forwards with knee bent, one leg back. I kick up with my right. Left foot forwards right foot back. Tap the back foot on the mat and kick up with a straight leg, springing off the bent leg... Repeat until your body meets the wall. Push through your fingers, hugging in your tummy. The heels might just come away from the wall (Fig. 8).

Repeat at the wall without a cushion.

9 Bunny Hop with Both Feet

Rotate the pelvis away, butt to the wall scrape the heels up as before support the head, heels away from the wall. Then take the head away from the wall (Fig. 9).

When you return from the position, take a short relax so that the blood pressure gets even in the body. Enjoy the benefits.



Acknowledgment

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