

Benefits of Inversions

Improves the circulation and balance of all metabolic functions

Balances and nourishes the endocrine glandular system

Prevents build up from fluid in the legs

And stimulates the nervous system, increasing mental alertness and clarity

Heats the body and increases the gastric fire

Practicing inversions consistently creates an overall feeling of being “internally well groomed”

Inversions can also purify and calibrate the human system so that one might experience life at a higher resolution

According to some eastern traditions, turning the body upside down brings upward movement of the raw, powerful energy in the lower chakras through all the other chakras to the crown of the head.

PRECAUTIONS

When first practicing inversions, hold the postures for one minute and then work up over time (for example regular practice in a pose over 6 months) to 10 minutes.

Students already enjoy the benefits of inversions in simple postures like puppy, downdog, uttanasna. Keep a light heart as you practice the more challenging postures.

During menstruation- avoid turning the body upside down.

There are several cases where one may consider avoiding inversions completely. Counter indications for inversions include high blood pressure, glaucoma, and any previous neck injuries. In this case, viparti karani or legs at the wall is preferable and also equally enjoyable!

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN INVERTING by Donna Farhi

Turning the palms open, notice the slight hollow in the center of the palm, like the arch of the foot. Trace your finger along the four points of the outside of the hand.

When you press into any inversion or arm balances with your palms, it is important to take the weight in an even distribution throughout the palm.

When you place the weight evenly throughout the palm, you are providing the entire hand and body with a solid and balanced foundation.

Individuals with carpal tunnel or occupational stress in many cases have problems with this area because they press down on the median nerve unknowingly.

This 'even weight' also supports the health of the median nerve which is located at the base of the wrist.

Warm Up Shoulder Poses

The important thing to remember and great way to practice opening the upper back or shoulders is to make sure to maintain uddiyana bhanda or a neutral low back. **Keep the tailbone tucked under and soften the front rib cage down.** Another great way to practice opening the upper back while maintaining a neutral low back is to practice Sun Salutation with a block between the thighs.

Bring hands interlaced behind the back and feel the chest and 'xiphoid process' open. (This sword-like looking cartilage that does not completely solidify until the age of 40 is directly connected with our breath). When we open our diaphragm muscle and engage the ribs, we are utilizing the 'xiphoid process'.

Opening up the upper back in this way, also relieves compression and tension inside the rhomboid muscles behind the shoulder blades.

Practice standing and then exhale, fold forward and stretch the arms upward.

Open the shoulders safely we want to lengthen the intercoastal muscles and open the rotator cuff. Take the strap and from a seated position (sukasana, vajrasana or virasana).

Bring the strap overhead and keeping the arms parallel or next to the ears. Lower the elbows out to the side. Repeat.

Bring strap above the head and walk the arms out wider than shoulders and create the Letter L with your arms. Switch from side to side. Third shoulder opening with a strap.

Bring the hands again wider than the shoulders and drop the straps forward onto the lap. Bring the arms up next to the ears and drop the arms back behind the torso to a comfortable edge.

Bring your arms next to your ears and back behind you toward the floor, then up again next to the ears and in front.

Allow the giver to stand behind the partner, hold onto the forearms and take one step forward. Ask your partner to tuck their tailbone under and fall forward. Ask them as they all forward, to breath into the back and fill out the shape of the back.

Breathe into the trapeze area, continue to practice ‘uddiyana bhanda’ by filling out the back body and floating the kidneys. This can also be seen in the dolphin to plank whereby we bring the navel center in and fill out the hollow of the back body while opening the front body. **In plank pose, we say in yoga navel strong, tailbone long.**

Ask them to fall directly forward into a straight line with arms straight and chest opening.

(Use the chair) to open the shoulders by placing your elbows on a sticky on top of the chair and taking the palms pressed together and up toward the sky.

Finally, another great shoulder stretch, bring the right hand to the wall and turn the palm to the right parallel with the floor. Turn the torso to the left, bring the feet closer to the wall, keeping the hips adjacent to the wall. Walk the feet closer to the wall depending on your degree. Feel this tremendous stretch roll open the top of the shoulders. Take the other side.

Expanded Leg Pose (Prasarita Padattonasana)

The frame of the head, neck, and shoulders is the basis for Elbow Stand and Headstand. This pose helps to demonstrate how to develop a strong healthy space at the base and throughout the cervical spine.

Spread your fingers wide, and bend the elbows so your forearms form a right angle to the floor.

Broaden your shoulders away from your spine and roll them back away from your ears. Make sure the knee caps, inner ankles, wrist and elbows are working in concert together to lift the inner body strong..

Extend your elbows away out to the side and notice how this collapses the frame of the head, neck and shoulders. Now bring the elbows inward and notice how the coil at the base of the neck has become lengthened.

Problems in Headstand occur when the shoulders collapse down or out destroying the frame. The muscles then collapse and space between the cervical vertebrae narrow. The cervical curve may become flattened or accentuated.

Feet and Hands with the wall

Great exercise in working with the wall actively. Come to the wall. Face forward to the wall and bend the elbows. Bring the body closer to the wall until the hands are in line with the elbows. Spread through the ten fingers. Walk yourself back until you can't go any further. Drop your chest so that your ears and your upper body are in line with your arms. **This develops a strong tailbone action.**

Hands and Feet with the Wall

Sit with your back to the wall. Measure the distance from your hips to your feet. Bring your hands where your feet used to be. Take your feet the wall at the level of the hips. Use a partner to see the correct alignment of your shoulders. They need to be in one line from the **wrists to the hips**.

Dolphin Prep

An excellent foundation and start for the knack of inverting correctly!

Bring the elbows and the forearms to the mat. Have a partner come around to the front of the mat, sit down and place their feet on your upper back. Ask your partner to energetically push their feet into their partners shoulders together and upward. Now you can soften into your partners upper back. Soften and draw the rib cage into the back (uddiyana banda). Feel the sides of the waist lengthen and distribute the weight of the body evenly through the back. This again is referred to as uddiyana bandha and takes the “banana out of the back”.

Dolphin Prep At the Wall with a partner

Bring the feet to the wall. Same support with the partner. Feet behind the shoulder blades and lifting the scapula upward. Receiver will walk the legs up the wall slowly until the feet are hip height. As the receiver is ready, the giver will slowly take the legs away from the back. Now, you flying solo!

Elbow Stand (Pinchamayurasana)

Place shoulders-width apart with fingers strongly extended so thumbs and index fingers form a right angle.

Check to make sure that your weight is being carried on the outer edge of the forearm. You may use a strap around your elbows if you feel more comfortable.

Lift up out of the shoulders and avoid any crunching in the shoulders, head and neck.

Lift hips off the floor and draw pelvis up off the back and the back in so that there is space in the shoulder joints. (Dolphin Pose)

Keep in mind that while you are building strength, not to come up until there is a straight line from your arms through to your tail.

If you would like more stability and understanding of the posture, bring your elbows facing away from the wall one legs length. You may then come onto your elbows and forearms and have a partner check that your shoulders are really in one straight line.

Handstand

Prerequisites

Able to do Downdog with arms and torso in one line and able to lower your body into Plank pose without resting the chest or legs on the floor.

Instructions

Place hands, head or elbows one shin-length away from the wall.

Place the crease of the wrist parallel to the wall or front of the mat. This will make sure that even weight is being distributed.

Spread your fingers as wide as possible creating a greater surface area.

To reduce strain at the base of the wrists, lift the forearms away from the floor.

Gently arch the neck as you look at the floor between the hands, bending both knees, spring with your stronger leg (alternate legs provide equal support to low back if possible). *Draw your pubic bone to your navel* so that abdominal muscles are activated to hold the pelvis steady.

Headstand/COBRA (Adho Mukha Vrksasana~Bhujagasana)

Problems in Headstand occur when the shoulders collapse down or out destroying the frame. The muscles then collapse and space between the cervical vertebrae narrow. The cervical curve may become flattened or accentuated.

Use an open blanket if preferred for more support.

Place forearms on the floor and interlace fingers.

Unlock the pinkie fingers as you lift out of the bottom of the wrists.

Have the elbows no farther than shoulder distance apart for a strong foundation.

When you first learn this pose, use the arms to control the amount of weight you are releasing through the head and neck, first try letting your hair touch, then skin, then the muscles of the scalp-testing at each stage that your neck is comfortable.

Walk your feet in towards your elbows and bring a bunny hop to one foot, then two and hold. Note if you are not that flexible in the hamstrings yet, use the wall for support.

Lift your spine up and draw your shoulders away from your ears and create a strong frame for your neck.

(Stay for one minute the first month. Every month can add one more minute up until 10 minutes, but back up if you need to: the neck and the nervous system need to be conditioned slowly).

Headstand Variation

The use of two chairs and two blankets.

Bring your head between the chairs and notice your breath. Gently hop your legs up into a bunny hop and then gently extend the legs up to a Headstand.

Stay for a minute and save some strength two come out slowly.

Shoulder Stand (Salamba Sarvangasana)

Bring the feet above the hips and gently swing the legs up over the head keeping the hands behind the pelvis.

If you can see your own elbows, they are not supporting a proper posture.

In Shoulderstand, it is paramount that the elbows move in closer to the body and the upper shoulders stay on the back.

In order to do this, keep the elbows in and the skin soft around the base of the neck, like a sharpee puppy!

You will also want to be on the look out for a strong core, making sure to lift the legs at an angle from the belly muscles which will support a strong internal lift and greater protection for the body particularly the “boney vertebrae” in the neck called the C8.

Shoulder Stand Chair Pose

Bring 2 or more blankets to the floor in front of the chair facing the smooth edge away from the chair.

Take your yoga mat and fold it into 3's and place it on the chair with the flap off the back of the chair.

Sit on the chair and take the knees over the back side and holding onto the chair.

Slide your body gently down to the blankets. More blankets are preferable. Hold the chair and lift the legs up into a light angle. Breath.

Start with legs at the wall, bend the knees and walk the feet up the wall until the legs are straight. Push into the wall with gently straightened knees and lift up the back with the support of your hands

Plow Pose Chair

Take three blankets with the smooth edge facing toward the chair. Keep the sticky mat on the chair again with the flap over the back of the chair. Lay with your back on the blankets head facing the chair.

Grab gently the sides of the chair and lift the legs up and over the seat of the chair. Use the sticky mat to hold the legs in traction.

Take the hands to the lower back and lift the back body upward.

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Knee-to-Ear Pose (Karnipidasana)

Exchange the chair for the bolster. Slowly bend your knees and lower them to rest on the bolster. Bring your knees above your head to your forehead or to the outside of either ear.

Feel the weight resting on the back of the shoulders and breathe deeply into your back, staying here for a minute or more and feel the back muscles lengthening. Release your shoulders and interlock your hands behind your back and extend them strongly away from the torso and press gently into the earth.

When you are ready to come down, support your back with your hands and slowly roll out. Rest here.

Shoulderstand with the wall

Place a neatly folded stack of two to four blankets on top of a sticky yoga mat about 6 inches from the wall, with the smooth folded edges facing the wall.

Place part of the yoga mat over the blankets, leaving a 4-inch gap on the outer folded edge.

The yoga mat is there to prevent the blankets from moving and to prevent your elbows from sliding apart.

Place feet on the wall and slowly begin to lift the pelvis until your weight is over the shoulders.

Interlock your hands behind your back and stretch the arms toward the wall to open the shoulders.

Draw your arms inward so they are no wider than your shoulders.

In a well-supported posture the teacher should be able to lift your head slightly off the floor.

This little test means that your neck ligaments still have a little “give” and less likelihood for strain. Your neck, head, and hair need to be out of the way in order to release these areas away from your shoulders.

Then you are ready to take your feet off the wall. Extend one leg up and draw tailbone in toward the pubic bone to tone the pelvic floor.

