

Chair Kapoasana: pigeon pose

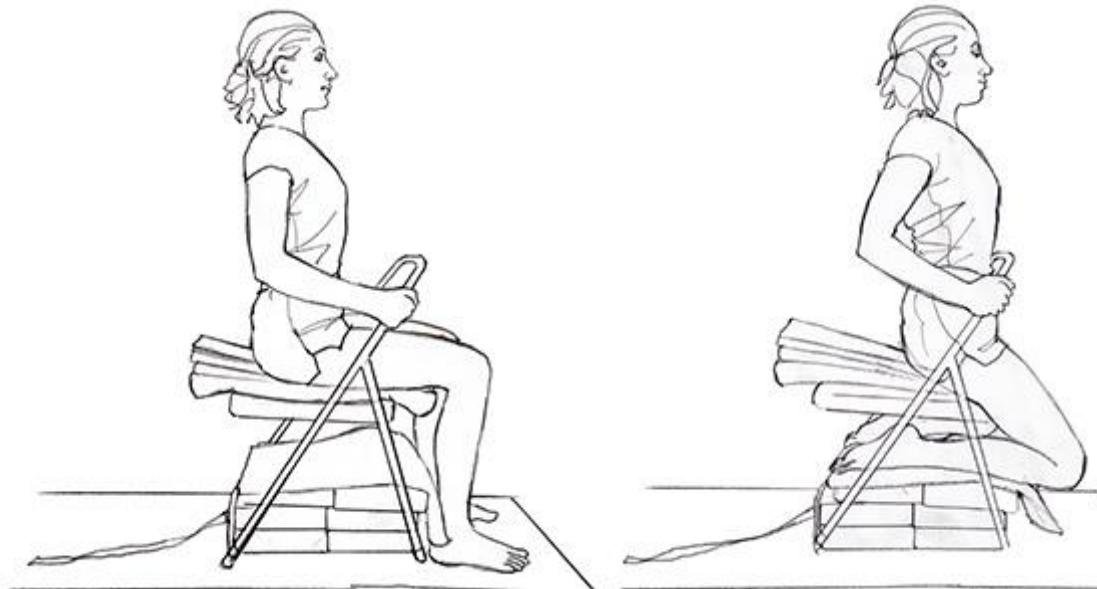
Kapotasana is a challenging backbend that benefits from some carefully thought out preparation. Presented here is one of my favorite variations – though it's going to be too advanced for many. For beginners, backbend (*Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana*) over a chair will be a better place to start.

Although *Supta Virasana* and *Ustrasana* do not necessarily have to be practiced in the same session as *Kapotasana*, master them before bringing *Kapotasana* (or chair *Kapotasana*, or *Kapotasana* with a Block and Bolster) into your practice.

- See *Light On Yoga*: BKS Iyengar advises beginners to come into classical *Kapotasana* from *Supta Virasana*.

Benefits: Practice *Kapotasana* Over a Chair to warm up for *Kapotasana* or on its own to mobilize the shoulders; strengthen and flex the spine; stretch the quadriceps and hip flexors; energize and strengthen the core, and steady and concentrates the mind.

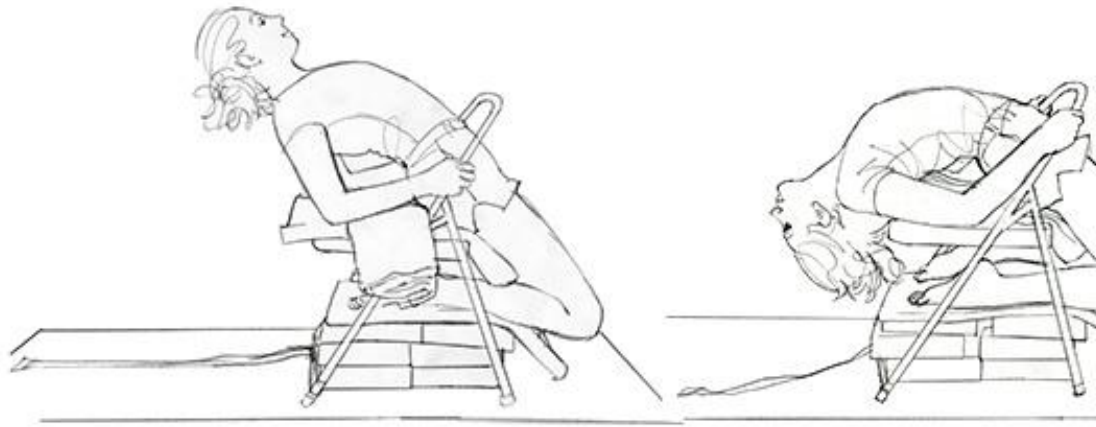
Chair Kapoasana



Set a chair up toward the front of a mat. Stack blocks under the chair to the level of the bars between the front and back chair legs.

Slide a folded blanket on top of the blocks and over the bars. Place a four-fold mat on the chair seat. (The person who modelled for these drawings has a long spine, therefore two extra mats were folded into eight and placed along the chair seat to increase the height for her.) Loop a belt around the front legs of the chair, and lay the end of the belt flat on the floor, perpendicular to the chair. Sit facing the back of the chair with the soles of your feet on the floor.

Holding the chair, tuck your legs one at a time under the chair and rest them on the support, toenails down. Move your feet apart until your outer ankles press the inside of the chair legs, and keep them there throughout the pose.

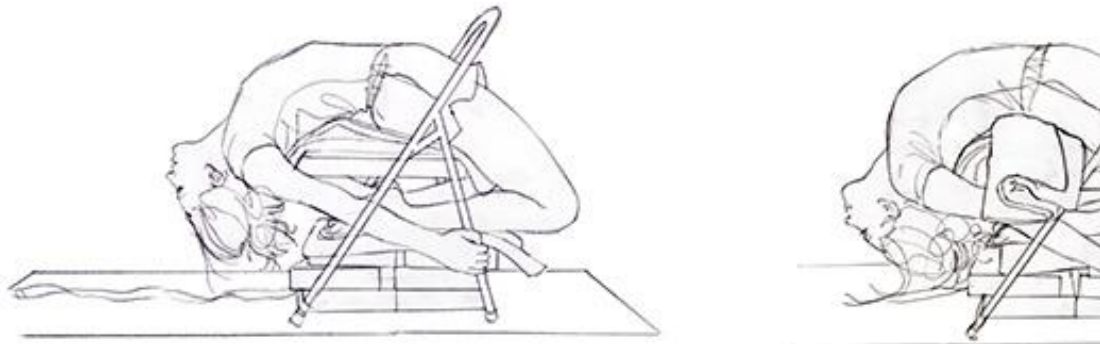


Here is another set-up with just one folded mat. A narrow fold blanket placed across the seat of the chair provides lumbar spine support. Experiment to see which set up works best for you.

Slide your pelvis further forward. Press the points of your shoulder-blades into your back to support the expansion of your chest and begin to arch back.

Place the lower tips of your shoulder blades just off the back edge of the chair seat. Lift your pelvis, tilt your sitting bones toward the ceiling, and sliding your pelvis forward, place it back down on the seat, so you rest as much of your weight as possible toward the upper part of your buttocks.

Then do a partial sit-up to lengthen your lower back: Press your elbows into the chair seat. Lift your back ribcage off the seat, extend it toward your head. Then place it back on the seat far away as possible from your pelvis. As you continue in the pose, maintain downward pressure on your upper buttocks and the back of your ribcage to resist their tendency to slide toward each other. Curve the tops of your shoulders and the back of your head toward the floor, puffing out your chest like a pigeon. Open your chest more by moving your shoulders farther down as your neck bends back.



Observe these two setups: The student is in fact bending back further around the front of the chair in the drawing on the right.

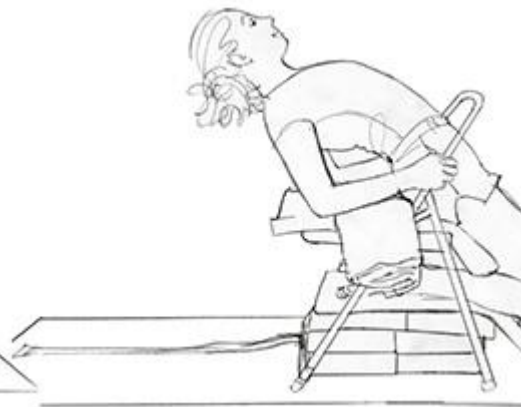
Variations:



Fold your arms and hold your elbows. But first adjust your position on the chair. If you don't, you'll slide too far off the seat toward your head when you take your arms overhead. To prevent this, shift your weight toward your knees so you'll overbalance slightly in that direction before you bring your arms overhead.

Take a hold of the belt.

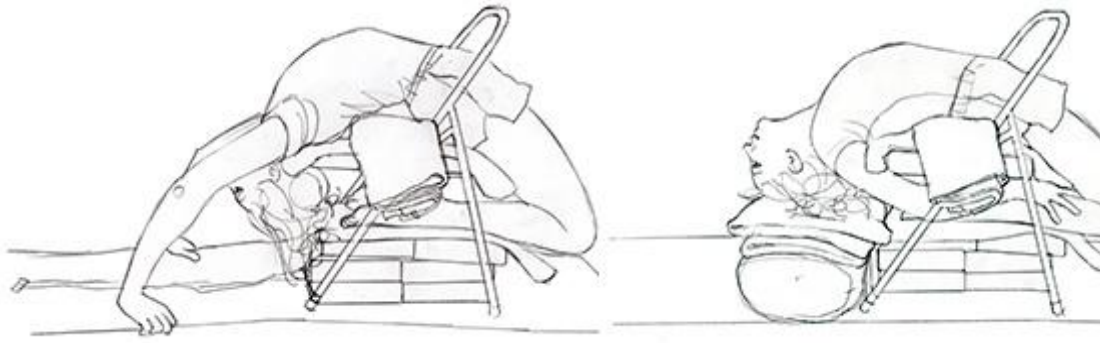
You may also extend your arms toward the floor: When you've adjusted your position on the chair, bend your elbows and pass your hands close to your ears as you reach toward the floor.



Walk your hands along the belt as close to the loop as possible.

If you're flexible enough, grip the chair's front legs with your hands.

To come out of the pose: release your hands and grip the sides of the chair. Carefully release your feet from under the chair one at a time. Adjust your position: slide your head toward the floor and your pelvis into the center of the chair seat. Press your elbows firmly into the chair seat, then sit up in one smooth movement, leading with your chest and bringing your head upright just as your body arrives at a vertical position.



Holding the mat.

A restorative variation: Chair Kapotasana with a bolster and blanket.