

Salamba Sirsasana (with channel)

Benefits: Sirsasana counteracts tiredness, improves concentration and boosts self confidence. When practiced correctly, headstand oxygenates the brain. It can also help those with memory loss.

Other benefits: helps those with arthritis of the lower back, dorsal region, and shoulder joints. It also reduces lumbago, sciatica, and general backache. Sirsasana works on the legs; any experienced yoga practitioner who has had the misfortune of spraining a knee or an ankle knows how effective this pose is at bringing down a swelling or inflammation in these joints. Varicose veins and coccyx pain and displacement can also be dealt with.

Diseases of the respiratory system, lungs and heart such as palpitations, asthma, breathlessness, bronchitis, nasal catarrh, chills, cold and cough, and (after medical treatment and rest) pleurisy and pneumonia, can all be brought to vibrant good health through regular practice of this pose.

This pose also brings relief for those suffering from digestive problems; constipation, acidity, colic and colitis can all be ameliorated with this and other poses. It can also boost low blood pressure. Other conditions that greatly benefit from Sirsasana are diabetes, displaced uterus, epilepsy, umbilical hernia, inguinal hernia, impotency, anemia, appendicitis, insomnia, kidney problems, menstrual disorders, prostate problems, tonsillitis and duodenal ulcer.

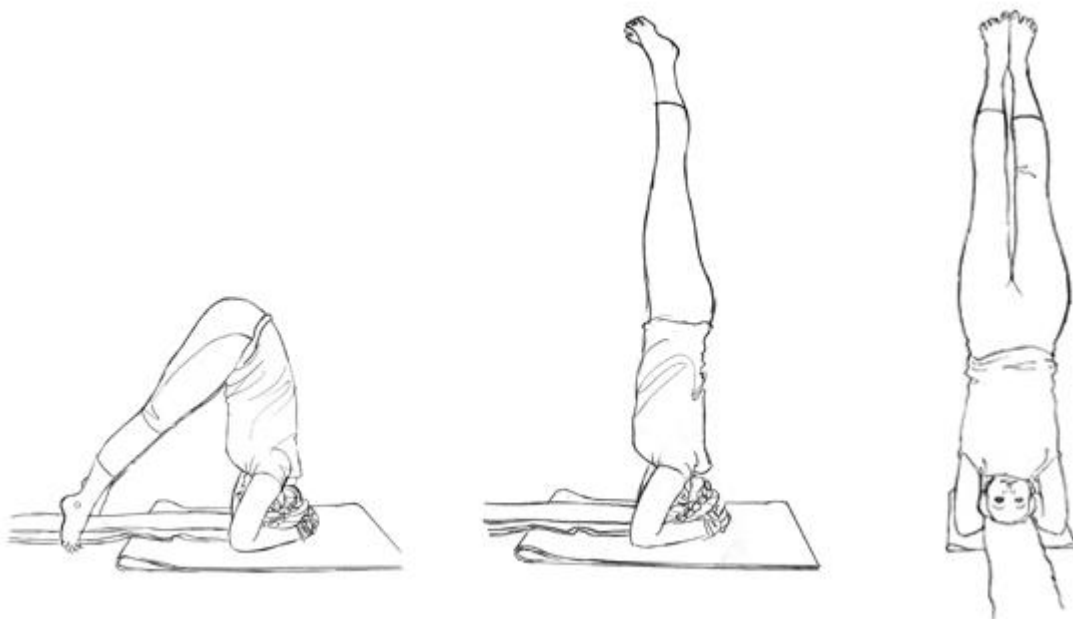
The Channel: Working with this support under the head, sometimes known as "the channel", helps you lift the weight of the body away from the neck, therefore avoiding neck strain. It allows you to remain in the pose for a longer time period. This prop simply makes it easier to lift up away from the floor.

Start by practicing against a wall. Fold your sticky mat into four and place it at the wall. Fold a blanket into a thick, narrow fold, approximately eight inches wide by three inches deep. Place it on the mat, two inches away from the wall with the tail facing out into the room.

Kneel down in front of a wall. Interlace your hands. Place your elbows a shoulder width apart on the floor and then place the outer edges of your interlaced hands on the floor, around the outside of the channel, and touching the wall. Place the crown of your head on the channel, which is inside your hands. Do not cover your hands with the blanket.

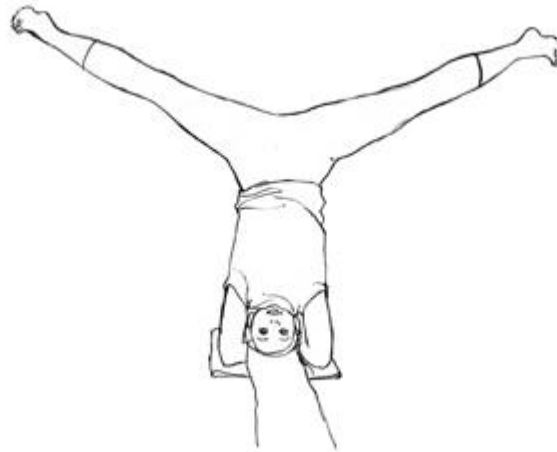
Raise your hips and straighten your legs. Press your forearms down and lift your shoulders away from the floor. Pull your upper back away from the wall.

Come up, one leg at a time.



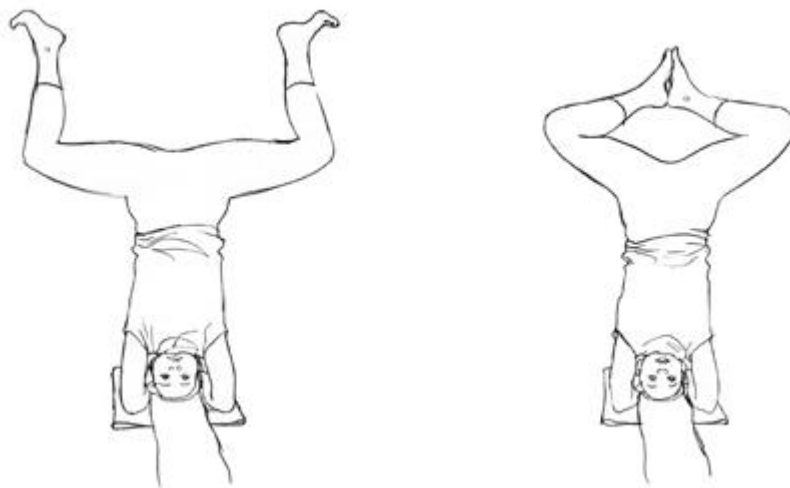
Place your feet but not your buttocks on the wall. To avoid compressing your neck. Secure a strong base: continue raising your shoulders up and pressing your shoulder-blades in toward your chest. Touch the inner edges of your feet together and stretch your legs up.

Gradually move away from the wall, a few inches at a time until you can balance without support. Don't be in a hurry to do this. Work diligently and methodically to develop strength and balance.



Variations:

Upavista Konasana in Sirsasana: Spread your legs apart as wide as you can without letting your sacrum fall back.



Goddess Pose in Sirsasana (left): bend your legs to form a right angle with your feet facing the ceiling, and your thighs parallel with the floor. Cut the backs of your thighs into your hip sockets and move the inner thighs away from each other. As we get older, this variation helps to keep the hip joints healthy. It mobilizes the hips and at the same time, helps firm the muscles around the hip joints.

Buddha Konasana in Sirsasana (right): maintaining contact of the back of your thighs into your hip sockets, bring the soles of your feet together.

PRACTICE NOTES:

Sirsasana is not for beginners. Iyengar yoga teachers really are second to none when it comes to teaching inversions! Learn this in an Iyengar Yoga level II yoga class.

Until you are ready to begin learning headstand, practice Prassarita Padottanasana (Standing Wide Leg Forward Bend Pose).

Always practice this pose regularly in equal measure with Sarvangasana (shoulderstand).