

## CHAPTER SIX

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# Standing Poses

*Be Strong*



*The basic difference between an ordinary man and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge, while an ordinary man takes everything as a blessing or a curse.*

— Don Juan

The principles of Tadasana are integral to the practice of every standing pose. Bringing strength, vitality, and balance to the body, the standing poses create and maintain a healthy spine. They also stretch and strengthen the muscles of the legs and encourage the core muscles to be fully activated. All the standing poses increase the body's need for oxygen. This creates additional stress on the heart and boosts blood circulation to often-neglected areas of the body, such as the joints, connective tissue, and internal organs. Oxygen is a source of nourishment to every cell; therefore an increased flow of oxygen to all parts of the body improves general health!

## GENERAL ALIGNMENT TIPS FOR ALL STANDING POSES

- Keep toes long with the mound of all toes flat against the ground.
- Always track the knees in line with the second and third toes.
- Keep hips in neutral position and in line with each other.
- Engage abdominal muscles.
- Telescope the ribcage upward, keeping it pressed against the spine.
- Keep neck long to avoid any pressure on the cervical spine.

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### ” Student Testimonial

*“I thought I was strong as a runner. Since practicing yoga and increasing my flexibility, I feel even more strength and power in my legs.”*

## STANDING POSES

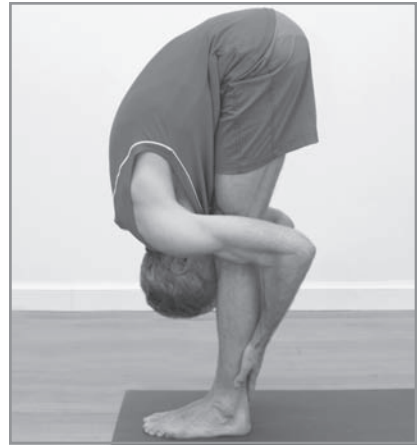
### UTTANASANA: FORWARD BEND

#### Description

- Start in Tadasana, with feet touching or hip-width apart.
- Keep spine in neutral position.
- Hinge from the hip joints.
- Bend as far forward as you can, keeping spine and neck long (**Figure 6-1A**).
- Place hands on floor, toes, ankles, shins, knees, or thighs.
- From the straight back position fold over, bringing the forehead as close to the legs as possible (**Figure 6-1B**).



**Figure 6-1A**



**Figure 6-1B**



#### Drishti

Initially, the gaze is at a point between the eyebrows (the third eye), which lengthens your spine. When you are in a full forward fold, the gaze is toward the knees.



#### Alignment Cues

- Feet touch or are hip-distance apart, depending on flexibility.
- Root through the four corners of the feet.

- Lift the kneecaps by engaging the quadriceps muscles.
- Roll the thighs inward.
- Stack hips, knees, and ankles in one vertical line.
- Spread the sit bones and lift them toward the ceiling.
- Kiss the forehead to the knees, releasing the neck and back muscles.



### **Benefits**

This pose will:

- Lengthen and stretch the hamstrings and inner thighs
- Strengthen the legs and ankles
- Strengthen and stretch the spinal muscles
- Relieve upper body tension
- Calm the nervous system by placing the head lower than the heart



### **Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!**

- Keep knees soft if any back or hamstring issues.
- Hands hold elbows or interlace hands behind back for increased stretch.
- Perform against the wall for more support.
- Place a block by the toes if you cannot touch the floor.
- Place a block between the inner thighs to engage the inner thigh muscles.
- Place the top of your head on a block to release the neck muscles and support the head.
- Stand close to a wall and place the hands on it at waist height, then walk away from the wall until the torso is parallel to the floor.

## **UTTHITA TRIKONASANA: TRIANGLE POSE**

### **Description**

- Begin in Tadasana.
- Jump or step the feet 3 to 4 feet apart.
- Extend the arms parallel to the floor.
- Turn your right foot out a perfect 90 degrees.
- Turn your left foot in about 15 degrees.

- Reach fully to the side with the right arm.
- Bring the right arm to the shin, ankle, floor, or block.
- The left arm extends upward toward the ceiling, palm facing forward and in line with the right arm (**Figure 6-2**).
- Repeat asana on other side.



**Figure 6-2**



### **Drishti**

The gaze is upward toward the extended arm, neutral (straight forward), or down at the floor. Listen to the feedback of your neck muscles.



### **Alignment Cues**

- Root the feet firmly, emphasizing the connection of the outside of the back foot to the ground.
- Lift the kneecaps up to straighten legs and engage the quadriceps.
- Make sure that the heel of the front foot is in line with the arch of the back foot.
- Revolve the trunk forward and up.
- Create equal length on both sides of the ribcage.

- Imagine that your entire spine is flat against a wall.
- Send your tailbone toward the back heel.
- Align your hands with your shoulders.
- Create a straight line with your top and bottom arms.



### **Benefits**

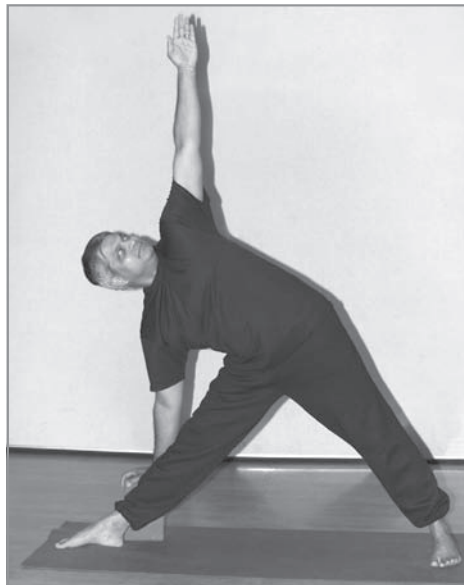
This pose will:

- Strengthen and tone the feet, ankles, knees, and legs
- Open the hips, chest, and shoulders
- Elongate the spine
- Stimulate and tone the abdominal organs and improve digestion
- Strengthen the neck



### **Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!**

- Keep knees soft if any back problems.
- Use a block behind the front shin to make the pose more accessible (**Figure 6-3**).



**Figure 6-3**

- Slowly extend the upper arm over the head for increased stretch.
- Practice using a wall to encourage proper spinal alignment.

## VIRABHADRASANA I: WARRIOR I

### Description

- Start in Tadasana.
- Step the left foot back about 3 to 4 feet.
- The left toes turn slightly outward.
- The right foot stays facing forward, parallel to the sides of the mat.
- Keep both shoulders and hips facing forward.
- Revolve the left hip forward.
- Bend the right knee so the knee tracks over the ankle and is in line with the second and third toes.
- The back leg is straight with the back heel and baby toe flat against the floor.
- The arms extend over the head with the palms facing each other (Figure 6-4).
- Repeat the asana on the other side.



Figure 6-4



### **Drishti**

The eyes look upward toward the hands, unless this is too strenuous for your neck. If so, look forward.



### **Alignment Cues**

- Ground the back heel solidly into the mat.
- Press firmly into the big toe mound of your front foot.
- Lift the quadriceps.
- Move the tailbone downward.
- Tilt the pubic bone toward the navel.
- Bring the left hip bone forward and the right hip bone back.
- Telescope your ribcage upward.
- Evenly stretch the arms upward.
- Draw the shoulder blades down the back.
- Make sure the front knee tracks directly over the second and third toes.



### **Benefits**

This pose will:

- Open the chest
- Strengthen the shoulders and arms
- Strengthen the ankles, knees, and legs
- Stretch the calves and Achilles tendon
- Develop endurance



### **Modification or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!**

- Create less of a bend in the front knee if you have knee problems.
- Keep your hands on your waist if the shoulders or neck are over-stretched.



- Place a blanket or block behind the back heel if the calf muscles are tight.
- Humble Warrior (**Figure 6-5**) can be performed to increase shoulder and chest flexibility.



**Figure 6-5**

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**Student Testimonial**

*“Yoga makes me feel healthy, strong, and limber, which boosts my self-image and self-confidence.”*

## **VIRABHADRASANA II: WARRIOR II**

### **Description**

- Start in Tadasana.
- Jump or step the feet approximately 4 to 4½ feet apart, with the arms extended to the sides and the palms facing the ground.
- Turn your right foot out a perfect 90 degrees.
- Turn your left foot in 15 degrees.
- The heel of the right foot is in line with the arch of the left foot.
- Bend your right knee, tracking it between the second and third toes.
- Turn your head to look over the right hand (**Figure 6-6**).
- Repeat the asana on the other side.



**Figure 6-6**



### **Drishti**

The gaze is out over the middle finger of the front arm.



### **Alignment Cues**

- Press the feet equally and firmly into the ground.
- Firmly root the baby toe side of the back foot.
- Align the shoulders directly above the hips.

- Work toward making the front thigh parallel to the floor.
- Let the tailbone heavily drop toward the floor.
- Draw the ribcage in as though you were wearing a tight vest.
- Move the chin slightly in toward the throat.



### Benefits

This pose will:

- Strengthen the back and legs
- Intensely stretch the groin
- Open and strengthen the musculature of the hips
- Tone the abdominal muscles
- Build stamina



### Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!

- Take a narrower stance.
- Decrease the bend of the knee, but keep the knee tracking over the second and third toes.
- Practice with your hands on your hips.
- Reverse Warrior: Reach the back arm down toward the straight leg. Raise the forward arm. Gaze can be under the armpit or down toward the back leg (**Figure 6-7**).



**Figure 6-7**

## UTTHITA PARSVAKONASANA: SIDE ANGLE POSE

### Description

- Stand in Tadasana.
- Jump or step your feet 4 to 4½ feet apart.
- Turn your right foot out 90 degrees and the left foot in 15 degrees.
- Bend the right knee until the thigh is parallel to the floor.
- Place the right hand behind the right foot.
- Elongate the ribs and revolve the right side of the body forward.
- Stretch the left arm over the head (**Figure 6-8**).
- Repeat the asana on the other side.



**FIGURE 6-8**



### Drishti

The gaze can be upward toward the extended arm, forward, or to the floor by the bent knee.



### Alignment Cues

- Fully root both feet. Pay special attention to the baby toe side of the back foot.
- Track the bent knee over the second and third toes and press the thigh open.

- Keep the torso from leaning forward or back. Maintain a one-dimensional plane.
- Feel a line of energy from the baby toe of the straight leg to the fingers of the extended arm.
- Revolve the chest and torso upward.



### Benefits

This pose will:

- Strengthen and stretch the legs and back
- Increase flexibility in the hips and shoulders
- Energize the digestive system
- Stretch the groin
- Tone the waist and abdominal muscles
- Build stamina



### Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!

- Place the right forearm on the thigh with the palm facing upward (Figure 6-9).



**FIGURE 6-9**

- Wrap the top arm around the spine and catch the thigh of the bent knee. Roll the top shoulder and chest open.
- Place the right hand on a block that is in front or behind the right foot.
- Place the right hand on the floor in front of the right foot.
- For the more advanced student, try Warrior Interlock. Reach the right arm under the thigh. Reach the left arm up and over the back. The right hand will then clasp the left wrist (**Figure 6-10**).



**FIGURE 6-10**

## **PARSVOTTANASANA: PYRAMID POSE**

### **Description**

- Start in Tadasana.
- Step the left foot back 3 to 3½ feet.
- Place the hands behind the back and hold the elbows with the hands.
- Lengthen and energize the legs, keeping them straight.
- Lift and arch the chest upward.

- Hinge the torso forward from the hip joint while lengthening the entire spine from the tailbone to the top of the head (**Figure 6-11A**).
- Fold forward until the chin touches the shin (**Figure 6-11B**).
- Repeat the asana on the other side.



**FIGURE 6-11A**



**FIGURE 6-11B**



### **Drishti**

The gaze should be toward the front leg.



### **Alignment Cues**

- Align the front heel with the back heel.
- The back foot is slightly turned out. The front foot is facing directly forward.
- Keep the back leg strong and straight.
- To square the hips, rotate the left hip bone forward and the right hip bone back.
- Turn both shoulders forward so they are directly above the hips.
- When bending forward, lengthen the torso away from the hip joint.
- When folded forward, lift the sit bones up and back.



## Benefits

This pose will:

- Stretch the legs, back, and shoulders
- Increase hip, shoulder, and wrist joint flexibility
- Strengthen the legs
- Develop balance
- Improve stamina



## Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!

- Bend the front knee as needed.
- Interlace the fingers behind the back, place palms in reverse Namaste, or, for extra support, place hands on the floor by the front foot.
- Pose can start with arms stretched overhead, palms together, and thumbs crossing.



## Yoga Science

The health-related aspects of physical fitness—defined as muscular strength and endurance, general flexibility, cardiopulmonary endurance, and body composition as well as pulmonary function—were evaluated in a study of volunteers before and after eight weeks of yoga practice (Raub, 2002). The study was composed of people ages 18 to 27. Significant increases were found in all the components of fitness except for body composition.

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## Student Testimonial

*“Since I began practicing yoga, I have noticed improved coordination and concentration in other daily activities. Even painting the inside of my house was easier.”*



## UTKATASANA: CHAIR POSE

### Description

- Start in Tadasana.
- Hinge from the hip joint so the tailbone moves backward and downward.
- Bend your knees as though you were sitting in a chair and the thighs form a right angle with your shins.
- Squeeze your ankles, knees, and thighs together.
- Float the arms upward until the palms are facing each other overhead (**Figure 6-12**).



**FIGURE 6-12**



### Drishti

Gaze should be upward or forward.



### Alignment Cues

- Ground the four corners of the feet evenly into floor.
- Engage the inner thigh muscles fully by squeezing the knees together.

- Imagine sitting in a chair.
- Bend the knees as much as possible, keeping the heels on the ground.
- Keep most of the weight on the heels.
- Feel as if the arms are hanging from a tree and your tailbone is pulling toward the floor.
- Draw the shoulder blades down the back.
- Draw the chin toward the throat so the neck stays long if looking forward.



### **Benefits**

This pose will:

- Strengthen the muscles of the back, buttocks, legs, and ankles
- Tone abdominal muscles
- Stimulate the digestive system
- Stretch the muscles of the chest and shoulders



### **Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!**

- Keep arms down by the sides of the body or straight forward.
- Create less of a bend in the knees.
- Look forward.
- Have feet wider apart.
- Place buttocks and spine flat against the wall. Have the feet about 18 inches from wall. Bend the knees until the thighs are parallel to the wall and shins are directly over the ankles. The arms can be stretched parallel to the floor or hands can be in Namaste.

## **PARIVRTTA TRIKONASANA: REVOLVING TRIANGLE POSE**

### **Description**

- Start in Tadasana
- Step the left foot back 3 to 3½ feet.
- Place the hands on the waist.
- Lengthen and energize the legs, keeping them straight.
- Lift and arch the chest upward.
- Hinge the torso forward from the hip joint while lengthening the entire spine from the tailbone to the top of the head.

- Keep the spine parallel to the floor and place the left hand either on the shin, by the big toe, or on the baby toe side of the right foot.
- Stretch the right arm upward so that the arms make a straight line (Figure 6-13).
- Repeat the asana on the other side.



Figure 6-13



### Drishti

The gaze is upward toward the top hand, neutral, or downward at the floor.



### Alignment Cues

- Ground the four corners of the feet.
- Lift the knee caps to activate the quadriceps.
- Square the hips by revolving the right hip back and the left hip forward.
- Lengthen the waist equally on both sides.
- Lengthen the spine and lift the sternum as you hinge forward.
- Rotate the torso upward as you roll the right shoulder back.
- Energize the arms, while creating a straight line from fingertip to fingertip.



### **Benefits**

This pose will:

- Relieve lower back discomfort
- Increase flexibility in the hips
- Strengthen the legs
- Massage the internal organs
- Energize the entire body
- Stimulate right-left brain coordination



### **Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!**

- Bend the front knee.
- Place the hand on a block either to the inside or outside of the foot.
- Keep the extended arm on the hip.

## **PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA: EXTENDED LEG FORWARD BEND**

### **Description**

- Start in Tadasana.
- Jump or step at least 4 feet apart.
- Place hands on the waist.
- Hinge from the hip joints and bend until the spine is parallel to floor.
- Place hands on the floor in line with the arches of the feet. The fingertips face forward.
- Bend the elbows backward.
- Rest the top of the head on the floor (**Figure 6-14**).



Figure 6-14



### **Drishti**

The gaze is toward the third eye or the floor.



### **Alignment Cues**

- Ground the four corners of the feet.
- Lift the kneecaps to keep the legs straight.
- Internally rotate the thighs as you hinge forward.
- Stretch the spine to create length from the tailbone to the crown of the head.
- Keep the hips in line with the ankles when you are folded forward.
- Tuck the head under so that the top of the head reaches the floor.



### **Benefits**

This pose will:

- Strengthen the legs and ankles
- Increase flexibility in the hamstrings and lower back
- Calm the mind and nerves



### **Modifications or Ways to Make the Pose Work for You!**

- Take legs wider to get the head to the floor.
- Bend the knees as necessary.

- Place two blocks under the shoulders. Keep the spine parallel to the floor and place the hands on the blocks.
- More advanced students can interlace the fingers behind the back and reach palms toward the ceiling.

## **MALASANA: BASIC SQUAT POSE**

### **Description**

- Start in Tadasana with the feet about 8 inches apart and the hands in Namaste.
- Energetically root through the four corners of the feet.
- Open the chest and roll the shoulder blades down the back.
- Slowly bend the knees until the knees are fully flexed.
- Press the elbows to the insides of the thighs to lift the chest and lengthen the spine (**Figure 6-15**).



**Figure 6-15**



### **Drishti**

The gaze is straight ahead or eyes are closed.



### Alignment Cues

- Keep the heels firmly planted on the ground.
- Release the tailbone to the floor without rolling the knees inward.
- Keep the spine long and open.
- Roll the armpits and chest forward.



### Benefits

This pose will:

- Strengthen the feet and ankles
- Open the hips
- Strengthen the spine
- Improve balance and poise
- Prepare one for childbirth



### Modifications or How to Make the Pose Work for You!

- Have the feet farther apart to make the pose easier.
- Place the heels on a folded blanket if heels cannot stay flat on the ground (**Figure 6-16**).
- Use a wall behind the lower back for stability and alignment.



**Figure 6-16**

## STUDY QUESTIONS

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1. Name three ways in which the standing poses benefit the body.
2. Name three guidelines for performing standing poses.
3. How is the alignment of Tadasana utilized in the other standing poses?
4. Describe three alignment cues for Virabhadrasana II.
5. Describe two modifications for Utkatasana.



## YOGA MOMENT

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Practice Utthita Parsvakonasana (Side Angle Bend) on both sides with and then without a block. Record your observations.