

Importance of Bhujangasana in Daily Life

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the science of life. It plays an important role to prevent and treat the disease. Ayurveda specifically deals with mind body balance. The main part of it is Yoga and Asana. Yoga provide us a simple remedies, facile skills and procedure of good health. Asana gives physical and mental power and tone the body-mind for further exercise. Bhujangasana is often referred to as the Cobra Pose. This Yoga Asana helps tones the abdomen and strengthen the spine. One of the main benefits of Bhujangasana is that it helps to improve blood circulation. Snake pose in Yoga is considered one of the best Asanas to get a flat stomach. Bhujangasana benefits are extended to your beauty because of the stretching of the abdominal muscles.

KEYWORDS: *Yoga, Asana, Bhujangasana, snake pose, abdominal muscles.*

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INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda play an important role to prevent and treat the disease. It is the science of life. Health is disturbed today by the sedentary lifestyle, physical and mental pressure or stress, abnormal personal habits and food habits which cause many disease. According to various texts the primary goal of Ayurveda is – “Swasthasya Swastya Rakshanam, Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam”^[1] which means increasing the good health and treat the disease. Ayurveda specifically deals with mind body balance. The main part of it is Yoga and Asana.. It is essential to being healthy. Yoga appeared at the time of the Vedas and Upanishads. Yoga is India's oldest scientific, ideal devotional regulation. It is a process of teaching the brain and growing its capacity of fine perceptions. Yoga provide us a simple remedies, facile skills and procedure of good health and hygiene to gain physical and mental fitness in less time.^[2] Yoga is praised by modern medical science because it increase immunity, give disease free life and decrease the stress of present fast life. It is a scientific procedure by which we can develop our own inner strength with inself. In Sanskrit language Yoga means “adduction”, add the soul of human from the God. Yoga provides us moral and spiritual growth but also useful in prevent physical and mental disease.^[3] Yoga and Asana effect the physiology of important anatomical structure during procedure and steps.^[4] The definition of Asana is “Sthira Sukham Asanas”^[5] which means well balanced,pleasant position of body. Asana are the “skillful exercises” that gives physical and mental power and tone the body-mind for

further exercise.^[6] Asana helps to synchronize the mind with body.^[7]

Yogasana

Patanjali Yoga described about eight branches –Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharna, Dhyan, Samadhi. Patanjali Yoga given third place to Asana^[8], while “Hatha Yoga” given first place to “Asana” because it giving physical and mental happiness. “Ha” means sun which means energy of solar plexus, “Tha” means moon which means energy of the emotions, present in the limbic system of brain, so both the energy come together in the Yoga.^[9]

If Asanas is done accurately in relaxed and pleasant atmosphere, the muscles of the body get relax because these relaxing impulses go back to the brain and relax it. Other benefits are mental balance, good health, calmness of mind. The ancient Yogacharyas advised about the mastery of one Asana. Bhujangasana helps tones the abdomen and strengthen the spine. One of the main benefits of Bhujangasana is that it helps to improve blood circulation. Snake pose in Yoga is considered one of the best Asanas to get a flat stomach.

Aim and Objectives

- To elaborate the benefits and anatomical structures of Bhujangasana.
- To escape from injuries which held by doing Bhujangasana.

Material and Methods

- Texts related to *Yoga-Asana* and their commentaries.
- Other source are online information, print media, journals etc.

Bhujangasana

- *Bhujangasana* is often referred to as the Cobra Pose.
- This *Yoga Asana* helps tones the abdomen and strengthen the spine.

The name *Bhujangasana* comes from the Sanskrit word '*Bhujanga*' which translates to 'snake' or 'serpent' and '*Asana*' meaning 'posture'. Hence, it is often referred to as the Cobra Pose, as it reflects the posture of a cobra that has its hood raised.

Seema Sondhi of The *Yoga Studio* in Delhi says, "The Cobra Pose opens up the shoulders and the neck, stretches muscles in the shoulders and chest, strengthens the arms and also helps treat constipation". It can be significantly useful at relieving discomfort in the muscles of the back, neck and abdomen. Just a little time spent in *Bhujangasana* goes a long way; especially towards reducing stress and anxiety. It is part of the sequence of *Yoga* postures in *Surya Namaskar* or Sun Salutation. Zubin Atre, Founder of The *Atre Yoga Studio* says, "If done right, *Bhujangasana* helps strengthen the

spine, and stretches anything between the navel and the chin".^[10]

Steps

अङ्गुष्ठं नाभिपर्यन्तमधो भूमौ विन्यसेत् ॥

करतलाभ्यां धरान्धृत्वा ऊर्ध्वशीर्षः फणीव हि॥41॥

देहाग्निवर्धते नित्यं सर्वरोगविनाशनम् ।

जागर्ति भुजगीदेवी साधनाद् भुजगासनम् ।42॥^[11]

How to perform the cobra pose with right techniques is one of the important aspects to extract its health benefits. The steps to do cobra pose is being mentioned here.

1. Lie down on the stomach by keeping your legs together. Make a gap of 1-2 feet between the legs if somebody has backache.
2. Put your palms besides your shoulder and the head should rest on the ground.
3. With inhaling raise your head up to your navel region and try to see the roof.
4. Maintain the position till 10 to 60 seconds with steadily inhaling and exhaling.
5. Come to the original position slowly with deep exhalation.
6. Repeat the process for 3 to 5 times.



Fig. Bhujangasana

Types

There are four types of *Bhujangasana*.

1. **Cobra pose (Saral Hasta Bhujangasana):** This is the advanced form of *Bhujangasana* when the head is raised just like the hood of a serpent or cobra. Cobra pose has been given special significance in *Hatha Yoga* and covers to all the body systems of the body from the health point of view.
2. **Curved hands cobra pose (Vakra Hasta Bhujangasana)** is an effective cobra pose that helps to enhance the efficiency of digestive system.
3. **Half cobra pose (Ardha Bhujangasana)** is also known as sphinx pose because the final *Asana* is resemble to an Egyptian sphinx. This *Asana* is particularly beneficial for those who have stiff back and helps to provide flexibility to the body.
4. **Cobra pose with raising palm**– This is good *Yoga* exercise for buttock. It can be practiced to reduce fat from the waistline as well as for buttock beauty.^[12]

Benefits of Cobra Pose

- Stretches muscles in the shoulders, chest and abdominals
- Decreases stiffness of the lower back
- Strengthens the arms and shoulders
- Increases flexibility
- Improves menstrual irregularities
- Elevates mood
- Firms and tones the buttocks
- Invigorates the heart
- Stimulates organs in the abdomen, like the kidneys
- Relieves stress and fatigue
- Opens the chest and helps to clear the passages of the heart and lungs
- Improves circulation of blood and oxygen, especially throughout the spinal and pelvic regions
- Improves digestion
- Strengthens the spine
- Soothes sciatica
- Helps to ease symptoms of asthma^[13]

Reduces belly fat: Although we claim that we practice *Yoga* for a perfect life, all beauty lovers secretly admire the benefits of *Yoga*. Snake pose in *Yoga* is considered one of the best *Asanas* to get a flat stomach. *Bhujangasana* benefits are extended to your beauty because of the stretching of the abdominal muscles.

Improves circulation: Good blood circulation is the key to staying energized and active. One of the main benefits of *Bhujangasana* is that it helps to improve blood circulation. Once you have good blood circulation, your body's cells will get enough nutrients and oxygen. Improved blood circulation will also help maintain hormonal balance.^[14]

Manage stress: If you have problems like anxiety or depression, here's the good news! Practice *Bhujangasana* as it is found very helpful in treating stress symptoms like fatigue, headaches and weakness. Along with this, it is effective in managing depression as well as to some extent. But, if you suffer from migraine or insomnia, take the advice of an expert.

Strengthens your spine: Since the snake pose in *Yoga* is helpful in providing a good extension to your back, it is very

helpful in strengthening your spine. It is designed so that your lower and upper back is stretched. But if you suffer from chronic back pain, it is recommended to consult a doctor to make sure you have no contraindications.^[15]

Contraindication

The few don'ts or contraindications that come under Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*) are:

- Those with severe back problems relating to the spine should clearly avoid this *Yoga* pose.
- Someone having neck problems relating to spondylitis too should clearly avoid this *Yoga* pose.
- Someone suffering from stomach disorders like ulcers should ensure proper guidance while doing this *Yoga* pose or avoid this *Yoga* pose if discomfort is seen or felt.
- Pregnant women should avoid this *Yoga* pose as a lot of pressure is felt at the lower abdomen and can also cause injury if the position of the arms is not correct while in this pose.
- Someone suffering from severe asthma should avoid this pose and work on breathing techniques through *Pranayama* before attempting Cobra Pose.

Thus with the guidance of a good *Yoga* teacher and a qualified experienced *Yoga* expert the above situations can be analysed and worked at with precautions.^[16]

Precautions

"Cobra pose is simple enough for beginners, but there are a surprisingly high number of mistakes made.

1. Wrong hand placement: "Before you lift your head and chest from the floor, make sure your hands are positioned correctly. Your hands should be next to your chest and under your shoulders.

2. Locking the elbows: "Many people keep their arms totally straight while getting into *Bhujangasana* and that is incorrect. Locked elbows can jam your shoulders toward your ears. So slightly bend your arms and relax.

3. Jamming the neck: In the classical version of Cobra pose, the neck is arched back in a graceful extension of the spine. This healthy arc can easily turn into unhealthily throwing the head backwards. To maintain length in the upper spine, gaze directly forward or diagonally downward.

4. Crunching the lower back: Cobra isn't about how high you can lift but about your spinal extension. Peel yourself off the floor one vertebra at a time to create a beautiful, even arc. If your arc is turning into more of an L shape, you've come up too high and should lower a few inches to avoid crunching your low back.

5. Clenching the buttocks: There is a temptation to squeeze the buttocks in *Bhujangasana* as the backward bend doesn't come naturally to the body. Save energy and relax your glutes instead".

6. Crowding the feet: If you're getting into low Cobra Pose, then it's okay to have your feet together. However if you're rising into extended Cobra Pose, your feet should at least be hip-distance wide to lessen pressure on the low back. Point your feet straight back, heels toward the sky and tuck your toes under.

7. Lifting the hips: Cobra pose uses the back muscles to maintain the lift rather than the arms and legs. While keeping the hips on the floor, use your back muscles-instead of brute arm strength-to lift your torso. Stop just before your hips lift off the floor.^[17]

Tips for Beginner's

Do not over do the backbend, avoid straining your back to find the height at which you can feel comfortable, if you feel uncomfortable than take your hands off the floor for a few moment, by which the height you find will be through extension.^[18]

Anatomy

Erector spinae. The erector spinae is a bundle of muscles and tendons in the back that control extension and rotation. Because they are responsible for straightening the back, the strength of the erector spinae muscles are closely linked with posture. The prime movers in cobra pose are the deep back muscles i.e. the erector spinae.

Trapezius muscle. The trapezius muscle extends from the back of the head down to the shoulder blade. It is partially responsible for the gross motor movements of the head and neck. When the practitioner firms the shoulder blades into the back in cobra pose, the trapezius muscle engages.

Abdominal muscles. The abdominals are located in the lower belly, between the ribs and the pelvis. They control the tilt of the pelvis and the curve of the lower spine. Engaging the transverse abdominis, which stabilize the spine, in cobra pose protects the lower back from dangerous compression.

Hamstrings. The hamstring muscles are the three long muscles that run along the back of the thigh. They extend the hip, flex the knee, and rotate the lower leg. In cobra pose, the hamstrings are the prime mover in the pose's hip extension. When the hamstring muscles are weak, the gluteus maximus compensates. This minimizes the benefit of the internal rotation and hip extension, so make sure your gluteal muscles are not working hard in cobra.

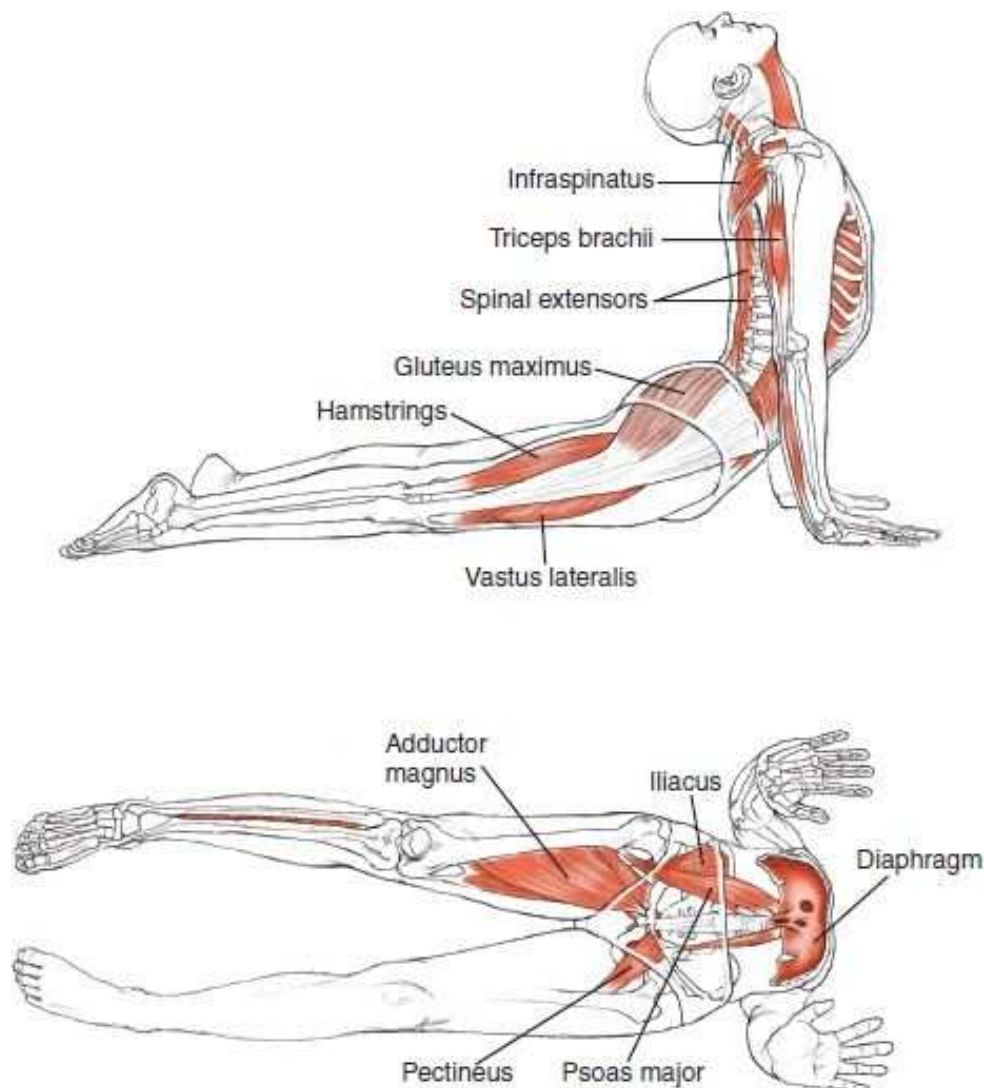


Fig. Anatomical structures effecting by Bhujangasana

Variations

Baby Cobra Pose (Saral Bhujangasana). Baby cobra pose is a gentle variation that engages just the back muscles. In step five (above), raise the palms off the mat so they hover less than an inch above it. Lift the shoulders and chest using just the back (engage your thighs and abdomen to prevent compression) for a mini backbend.

Twisting Cobra Pose (Tiryaka Bhujangasana). Twisting cobra Yoga pose exercises the obliques and improves range of motion. Once you've assumed full cobra posture in step eight (above), inhale and look forward. Exhale and twist to the right, looking over your right shoulder towards your left heel. Inhale and come back to center. Exhale and twist to the opposite side. Repeat in tune with the rhythm of your breath.

Striking Cobra Pose (Ardha Ustrasana). Striking cobra *Yoga* pose is a dynamic variation that incorporates child's pose (*Balasana*). Since child's pose is a counter pose to cobra, this dynamic sequence is incredibly beneficial. Once you've assumed full cobra posture in step eight (above), exhale and push back into child's pose. Keep your palms stationary on the mat and your elbows bending backwards, not side ways. Inhale and "slither" low across the mat with elbows bent, back into cobra pose. Repeat in tune with the rhythm of your breath.^[19]

Bhujangasana Modifications

Reading the strength and flexibility of the body of the students should be an important observation by the *Yoga* teachers. As no two bodies have the same flexibility and shape, the alternative ways to perform a particular *Yoga* poses can vary. The common modifications though are explained below:

- It is important to enjoy and understand the body during the practice of any *Yoga* pose, so in Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*) try and avoid pushing the back beyond your limit. In order to get the back a bit comfortable, you could bend the elbows a bit backwards and release the stress around the lower back.
- If the wrists are not strong to be placed on the floor directly, you could use a blanket to give that extra support and enjoy the *Yoga* pose.
- If the back is still stiff and you cannot take it further, then try and start with supporting the body on the upper abdomen and chest first.
- If a student has a strong back but loses balance due to uncontrolled breathing, the *Yoga* teacher can help by lifting the arms of the student from behind thus giving the back the stretch that is required.
- One can use the wall for support too. Having the chest close to the wall, place the entire arms on the wall and stretch upwards on the wall. But make sure you have a teacher to guide you as a slip of the arms can cause injury.
- If the pressure on the lower abdomen is causing discomfort, then place a blanket below your pelvis and abdomen and with support raise the body up.

Remember the more the lower back is relaxed the more the rest of the body will relax. One can relax with proper breathing which is essential for the perfection of any *Yoga* pose.

Preparatory poses

As Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*) also works on the shoulders and arms apart from the back, the muscles around these shoulders and arms should be relaxed and worked at before going in to Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*). Some of the *Yoga* poses for preparation of Cobra Pose are below:-

- Stretches like Standing Spinal Twists (and Standing Spinal Twist II), Standing Side Bend Pose, Standing Backbend, Standing Side Stretch, Standing Pelvic Circle and Standing Forward Fold are a good way to open up the arms and lower back.
- *Suryanamaskar*: The series of *Yoga* poses in *Suryanamaskar* has in itself 12 *Yoga* poses and of which Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*) is one of them. So practicing the *Surya Namaskar* is beneficial. It tones the biceps and triceps, thus making them stronger for *Bhujangasana*.
- *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (Downward Facing Dog)

- *Advasana* (Reverse Corpse Pose)
- *Salamba Bhujangasana* (Sphinx Pose)

The preparatory *Yoga* poses can vary depending on the level of the student and their body.

Thus the sequencing for Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*) should be followed depending upon the students flexibility. The above *Yoga* poses were more for the intermediate level of the students.

Follow-up Poses

The benefit of any *Yoga* pose can be obtained only if the muscles which were put to stress are relaxed immediately. Thus under the category of relaxing *Yoga* pose or follow-up *Yoga* poses for Cobra Pose (*Bhujangasana*), a few are explained below:-

- *Prasarita Balasana* (Wide Child's Pose)
- *Vajrasana* (Thunderbolt Pose)
- *Matsyasana* (Fish Pose)
- *Savasana* (Corpse Pose)

Thus are few *Yoga* poses which can relax the body after performing Cobra Pose. The sequence of the *Yoga* poses can be modified as per the requirements of the students and their level of practice.

- *Salabhasana* (Locust Pose)
- *Dhanurasana* (Bow Pose)
- *Ustrasana* (Camel Pose)

Most of these back bends improve the blood circulation around the spine and thus bring an overall balance to the nervous system.^[20]

Conclusion

Yoga is the science of life. *Yoga* is India's oldest scientific, ideal devotional regulation. It is a process of teaching the brain and growing its capacity of fine perceptions. *Yoga* provide us a simple remedies, facile skills and procedure of good health and hygiene to gain physical and mental fitness in less time. Daily practice of *Yoga*, *Asana* and *Pranayama* with proper attention gives result pure blood supply to body parts like heart, liver, lungs, pancreas, intestine, kidney, ligaments, tissues, muscles, and glands of human body. It also increases the digestion power. It control power of the sense organs and awareness. *Yoga* and *Asana* will give disease and stress free healthy life. Anatomical structures during breath and postures as lungs, ligaments, muscles and bones, ligaments, joints, muscles and tendon during movement are involved. Anatomical structures and their work are behind the scientific benefit of *Yoga* and *Asana*. *Bhujangasana* is a complete *Asana* which manage the health of human body and improve the spiritual level. *Bhujangasana* is a series of the *Asana* gives very much remedial effect in all the back problems and improve digestion also.

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