

Benefits:

Builds strength in and loosens: neck, shoulders, lower back, abdominals, inner thighs, groin ligaments and quads (thighs). Builds up breathing muscles in the upper body. Helps straighten the body for better posture and balance.



Body Parts Used by This Posture:

Neck, shoulders, lower back, abdominals, inner thighs, groin ligaments and quads (thighs).

Combines Well with: Puppy.

Builds you up for / Warms you up for: Butterfly, Lunges, Modified Side Stretch, Wheel.

Build up to this pose with / Warm up for it with:

Back Bend 1, 2, 3, Pelvic Lift, Wood Chopper

Compensate with: Puppy

This Pose Can Substitute for: Wheel

Energy Centers Used: Belly, Solar Plexus, Heart

Try Learning First: Back Bend 1, 2, 3

Who Should Not Do This Pose: Pregnant women, people with lower back Injuries, people with rods in their lower back.

Here is a demanding pose that will give you a tremendous core work out. It also does wonders for loosening the hips for better walking, jogging and hiking. It's great for loosening the shoulders, straightening posture, developing better balance and building better breathing. The Camel is not for the beginner, nor for those with any lower back injuries. It's very important to attend to the details of alignment, especially while going into and out of the pose. We strongly recommend that you first build up core strength with other poses, like the Wood Chopper and the Back Bend series before attempting this posture.

Yoga Snack

Not a Yoga Snack pose. It takes time to prepare your body to do this pose. For this reason, the Camel is best done when included as part of your routine. We strongly recommend that you warm up to this pose with postures that loosen the shoulders, spine and quads. For example, the Wood Chopper, the Back Bend, the Puppy and the Rabbit.



Start

Kneeling, legs hip width apart.

Safety Keys

Be sure to do a slight pelvic tilt. This will help protect your lower back for the back

bend movements that come next.

Elongation of the Spine

Take a moment to elongate your spine. This will further protect your back and give you more flexibility as you bend backwards.

Tip Take a few breaths to settle into place. With each breath out, feel the weight in your hips and legs sinking toward the floor; your shoulders letting go, dropping down; notice your arms hanging loosely by your sides. This moment will loosen your body before you begin and give you better results with the least risk of injury.

Next - for Those New to This Posture

Reach your hands behind your back. Place them at the small of your back, where your spine joins your hips. Spread your fingers out so that you can fully support your lower back with your hands.



Bend your upper body backwards, supporting your movement with your hands. Reach your chest toward the ceiling. Stretch your spine *up and back* to produce the arching shape in your spine and to further protect your lower back.

**Tips**

- Imagine the top of your head reaching outward, stretching away from your neck and spine.
- Reach your belly for the ceiling, this will help your lower back arch.
- As you arch your body up and back, press inward with your hands. This will bow the front of your body outward and assist the movements.

Hold for 2 – 6 breaths or until you reach the limit of your ability to arch up and back.

As you hold the pose:

- Each time you breathe in, reach your chest more toward the ceiling.
- Also as you're breathing in, bring your shoulder blades more and more together, and reach your head more and more back toward your legs. As you do these two steps, you'll feel your upper body sinking and arching.

You Will Feel This in:

Your neck, shoulders, rotator muscles in your shoulders, shoulder blades, front of your chest, all along the front of your body, in your abdominals, groin ligaments and thighs. Some people even feel their knees stretching.

Safety Tips

If you begin to feel pinching in your lower back, you've gone too far. Adjust the pose by easing up until you do not feel this any longer.

It's common to feel your body shaking slightly as you do this pose. This means your muscles are working hard, building strength. It also means that you can easily go into muscle fatigue. So, at this point, you need to be careful not to work the pose so deeply or holding it so long that you cannot safely ease out of it with control.

Release

To release the pose, reverse your movements, being sure to support your back well as you straighten.

Next - for Those Ready to Go a Bit Farther

Reach your hands behind your back, as before. Place them at the small of your back, where your spine joins your hips. Spread your fingers out so that you can fully support your lower back with your hands.



Start bending your upper body up and back, supporting your movement with your hands, as before.



Turn your body slightly. Drop one hand toward its corresponding heel. (If you cannot reach the heel, see if you can reach your ankle or calf muscle.) Keep supporting your back bend with the other hand. Keep turning until your hand reaches your heel. Settle into place.



Holding on to your heel, turn your hips back toward the front. They might not completely return to the front, but turn them gently until they reach their limit.

Then, each time you breathe in, reach your chest more and more toward the ceiling, assisting the movement by gently pressing you hip forward with its supporting hand.

You will probably feel this part of the movement in your groin ligaments and in your thighs. If you feel it in your lower back, you've turned too far, are arching too deeply into the pose or are not ready for this variation of the Camel yet.

Hold for 2 – 6 breaths
 or until you reach the limit of your ability to arch up and back.

All the tips and caveats from the previous page 3 apply.

To Release the Pose, reverse your movements, until you are upright again.

Repeat on the other side.

Full Camel



First, from the starting position on your knees, reach your hands behind your back. Place them at the small of your back, where your spine joins your hips. Spread your fingers out so that you can fully support your lower back with your hands.

Bend your upper body backwards, supporting your movement with your hands. Reach your chest toward the ceiling.



Stretch your spine *up and back* to produce the arching shape in your spine and to further protect your lower back.



Tips

- Imagine the top of your head reaching outward, stretching away from your neck & spine.
- Reach your belly for the ceiling, this will help you arch your lower back.
- As you arch your body up and back, press inward with your hands. This will bow the front of your body outward and assist the movements.

Next

Once you are well into the back bend, release your hands from your lower back and allow your arms to drop directly down from your shoulders.



Continue to arch your body up and back until your hands can hold on to your heels. Firmly grasp your heels. Settle into place.



Hold for 2 – 6 breaths or until you reach the limit of your ability to arch up and back.

As you hold the pose:

- Each time you breathe in, reach your chest more toward the ceiling.
- Also as you're breathing in, bring your shoulder blades more and more together, and reach your head more and more back toward your legs.

As you do this, you'll feel your upper body sinking and arching.

- Each time you breathe out, bring your hips more forward, stretching your thighs, groin and thighs as they pull away from your hands.

As the pose gets deeper, you can adjust your hands, moving them to the soles of your feet, for a stronger stretch.

You Will Feel This in:

Your neck, shoulders, rotator muscles in your shoulders, shoulder blades, front of your chest, all along the front of your body, in your abdominals, groin ligaments and thighs. Some people even feel their knees stretching.

Safety Tips

If you begin to feel pinching in your lower back, you've gone too far. Adjust the pose by easing up until you do not feel this any longer.

It's common to feel your body shaking slightly as you do this pose. This means your muscles are working hard, building strength. It also means that you can easily go into muscle fatigue. So, at this point, you need to be careful not to work the pose so deeply or holding it so long that you cannot safely ease out of it with control.

Release

To release the pose, reverse your movements, being sure to support your back well as you straighten.

Bumping It Up a Notch

When you're very well practiced at the Full Camel and your back and abdominals are very strong you will no longer need to support your lower back as you go into the pose. You will know you're ready for this when back bends like the Wood Chopper are very easy for you and when you do them very deeply, almost bending your body to a ninety degree angle. When that day comes, this how you start the Camel pose:



- From the starting position on your knees, begin leaning backward. Let your arms be loose. They will start to drop back, hanging over your heels.



- Arch your body up and back, bringing your hands closer and closer to your heels. When you reach them, hold on firmly.



- Continue as before.
- Release the pose by reversing your movements

Notice that this way of going into and out of the pose gives your abdominals and thighs a stronger work out.

Breathing



In Your Starting Position

Take a few breaths to settle into place. With each breath out, feel the weight in your hips and legs sinking toward the floor; your shoulders letting go, dropping down; notice your arms hanging loosely by your sides. This moment will loosen your body before you begin and give you better results with the least risk of injury.

Beginners: take several breaths to go into the Beginner's Version of the pose.



Breathing in to arch up and back.

Breathing out to deepen your back bend.

More advanced practitioners go into the pose in one breath:



Breathe in to arch your chest up and back.



Breathe out to completely settle into the pose, holding onto your heels as you finish breathing out.



Once you're in the Full Camel:
Breathing in: Arch your chest more and more toward the ceiling.
Also while Breathing in: bring your shoulder blades more and more together, bringing the upper body closer and closer to your legs.



Breathing out: Bring your hips forward, stretching your thighs, groin and thighs as they pull away from your hands.

Releasing the Pose
Breathe in as you return upright.

Try This Great Combination

Try combining the Camel with the Puppy for a well rounded workout for all muscle groups involved.



Breathe in as you begin the Camel



Breathe out as you settle into the Camel.



Hold as you breathe in and out.



Breathe in as you return upright, lengthening your spine, preparing for the Puppy.



Breathe out as you slide into the Puppy.
 Breathe in and out as you hold the Puppy.



Breathe in as you return upright.

Knees stay in one spot for the entire combination of movements.