

Cobra (with Optional Twist) Level 5 Difficulty

Benefits Loosens & Strengthens spine & shoulders. Helpful in learning to pace breathing. Releases energy in the spine, to energize.

Time to Do 30 seconds to several minutes.

Body Parts Used Shoulders, upper arms, spine

Warm Up with / Build Up to It with: Complete Breath; Wood Chopper; Leg Fold; Back Bends 1, 2 & 3; Puppy, Pelvic Lift / Bridge Pose; Bust Expansion, Twists, Elbow to Knee 2.

Builds You Up for: Balance Posture 2, 3; Camel, Wheel (Back Push Up); Plow.

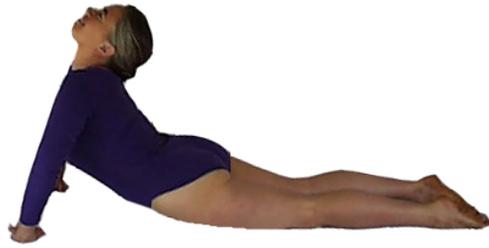
Try Doing First: Locust

Follow with: Cobra with Twist; Puppy, Child Pose. Is also part of the Sun Salutation.

Energy Centers: Belly, Solar Plexus, Heart & Throat. Mostly Solar Plexus and Heart.

Best Breathing Themes: Goes well with themes that match movement with breathing or that pace the breath, like Yellow Level Themes and Blue Level themes; Breathing Theme 11 for example. Good for training in themes that are about deliberately relaxing your body, like Breathing Themes 1, 2 and Green Level Breathing Themes.

Do not do this pose if: You are pregnant, (as if you need us to tell you that!), or if you have lower back injuries.



Start

Lying down. Arms by your sides. Ideally your forehead is on the floor. Or, rest your chin on the floor instead, if that is your only way to get comfortable.



Tip Don't twist your head to the side. That twists your spine. You won't get the benefits of the pose, won't get as far, and are more likely to injure yourself.

Making It Easier

You might breathe better and might be more comfortable if you put a folded towel under your forehead and take off your glasses.

Cobra with Optional Twist (Continued)

Important Detail as You Set Up

Elongate Your Spine

Once you are lying down with your arms by your sides:

Stretch your heels away from your hips. Then let them drop and relax.



Lift your head and chest off the floor and move them slightly away from your hips. Feel your stomach stretching. Then lower your upper body back down to the floor.

Feel your weight sink into the floor.

These two stretches lengthen your spine. (They help the vertebrae separate a little from each other.) They will make your spine more flexible and will keep pressure off your lower back. You'll get farther into the cobra before your spine and back stop you.



Sweep your hands along the floor, over head, like you're making a snow angel. Then slowly sweep your hands down to rest under your collar bones. Hands point toward each other but not touching.



(Having your hands point toward each other separates your shoulder blades and makes your spine even more flexible.)

For Sun Salutations fingers point forward.

After you settle into this starting position, take a few breaths to feel your body sinking into the floor. Especially feel your head and shoulders letting go as you breathe out.

Cobra with Optional Twist (Continued)

Going into the Pose

The lift starts from your head and spreads down your spine.



1. Look up.
2. Lift your head and chin upward.
(Stretch your chin wayyyy up.)

Safety Tip Don't lift your head and neck so much that you feel pain in your neck.



Start pushing your body up off the floor.
Shoulders come up first



Keep pushing upward as you raise your body, one vertebrae at a time.

Stop before you feel pressure in your lower back.

Hips stay on the floor.

Tips for Excellence

Think of the movement this way: You are stretching your upper body forward, up and back. Feel your stomach stretching up and back, more and more, as you push your body up.

Final Detail

If you back is strong.

Arch your spine even more by stretching your belly more toward the floor.



When you do this, don't lose the height you've reached.

Hold for 0 – 20 breaths.

Tip

Let go before your arms begin to shake!

Don't hold the pose so long that your muscles begin to hurt or so long that you can't let it go smoothly and slowly.

The benefits of this pose come from moving into and out of the pose with slow control.

Cobra with Optional Twist (Continued)

Breathing



Breathe in as you go up, into the pose.



Breathe out as you let the pose go.

Finish breathing out as you feel your weight sink into the floor.

Suggested Breathing Themes

To Build Shoulder Strength Use *Breathing Theme 4 - Exploring the Edge*.
To Loosen Your Spine Use *Breathing Theme 11 – Moving with the Breath*

Making it Easier

When you have lower back pain or your shoulders or neck resist the pose

Do a light lift of your neck and shoulders.



Adding a Twist

This works the muscles at the sides of your chest and loosen your neck and shoulders.



Go into the Cobra, to your fullest extension.

Twist at the waist and look all the way over your shoulder.

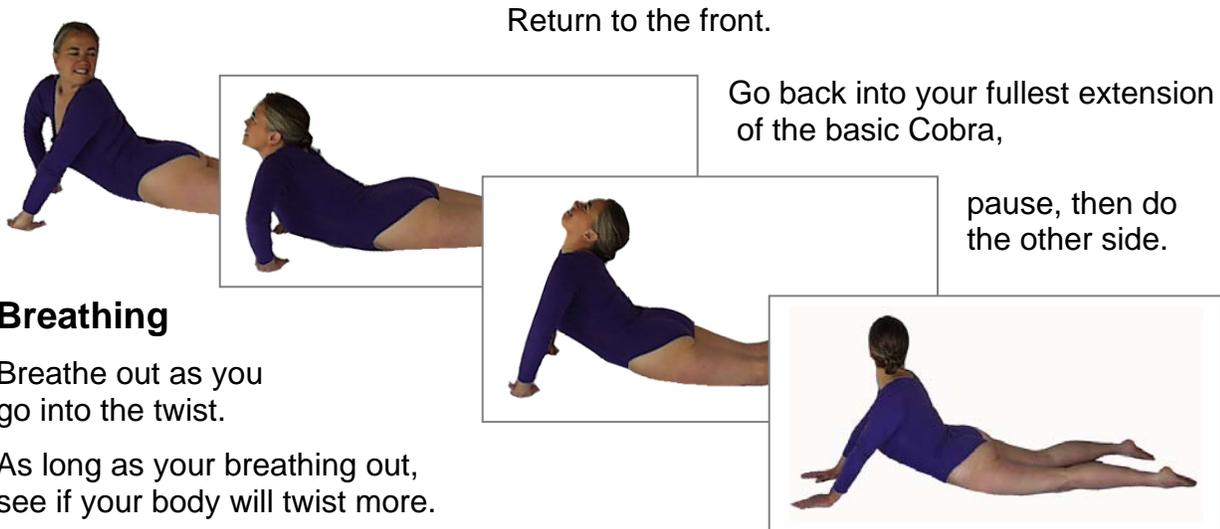


Push against the floor with your hands to make the twist happen.

Tip This twist starts with the waist twisting first, then the shoulders, then the neck and head. Think of it as your body wringing out like a wet wash cloth. You should feel the stretch in the muscles at the sides of your chest. If you feel it only at your middle back and shoulders, it means you're twisting from the shoulders. To twist from the waist, push against the floor with your hands.

Cobra with Optional Twist (Continued)

Release of the Twist



Breathe in as you come to the front and go into the full Cobra again.

Making it Easier

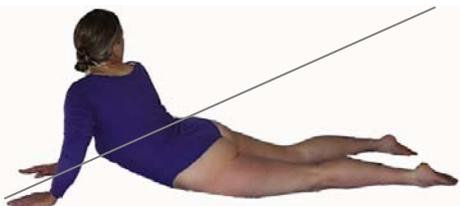
The Twist can be done from a simplified version of the cobra by just turning your head. This nicely releases tension in your neck and shoulders.



Common Errors

The key to the Cobra is keeping your spine fully elongated throughout the entire pose, including during the twists.

Slouching makes it harder to stretch up and back, it makes it harder to twist and puts a feeling of pressure on your lower back.



Cobra with Optional Twist (Continued)

If you are in the twisting movement and you feel like your middle back and shoulders are stopping you, this means you are slouching.

If you are in the basic Cobra and you are feeling pressure in your lower back, try stretching your body up, away from your hips, as if your tummy is stretching.



The Cobra as Part of the Sun Salutation

The Cobra fits into the Sun Salutation between the Dog and the Puppy.



Going from the Dog to the Cobra

Shift your weight into your hands and start dropping your hips down.



Lower your hips to the floor.



Stretch your body up and back into the full Cobra.



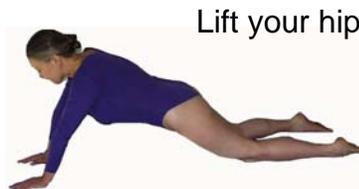
If this is too hard for you, try dropping your knees to the floor and getting yourself down onto the mat however you can. (Yoga is about working *with* your body. Thank heaven for that!)

For the Sun Salutation, the Cobra is done with the legs slightly apart

Cobra with Optional Twist (Continued)

Going from the Cobra to the Puppy

From the Full Cobra



'Scoop out' your lower back, that is, swivel your hips up toward the ceiling into a pelvic tilt.

Push your body up and back, pushing your hips back away from your hands while also pushing them up toward the ceiling

