

Benefits:

Strengthens & loosens shoulders; strengthens sides of chest, abdominals & lower back; improves posture.

Time to Do: 1 - 3 minutes

Body Parts Used by This Posture:

Shoulders; Sides of Chest, Arms

Warms You Up for: Triangle, Elbow to Knee 2 & 3, Chest Expansion, Back Bend, Bow, Bust Expansion, Posture Clasp, Dancer's Posture 3, Balance Posture, Half Moon, Twist

Warm Up with: Bust Expansion, Posture Clasp, Dancer's Posture 3, Back Stretch

Builds you up for: Postures requiring shoulder strength or strength in your sides; Dancer's Posture 3; Balance Posture, Back Bend, Chest Expansion Shoulder Stand, Head Stand, Elbow to Knee 2 & 3, Bow, Half Bow, Half Moon, Twist, Balance Posture. Also build up breathing muscles in the sides of the chest.

Energy Center Used: Heart, Solar Plexus



Here's one of the few beginning level poses that works the sides of the body. It's also a good one to help loosen up stiff shoulders – but if your shoulders are really stiff it can be tough. Remember, yoga is not a test! Take the posture in little bits – do one side, rest your arms, then re-establish your pose and do the other side. You'll gradually see benefits. (Which is better than not doing the pose at all and getting no benefits!) Remember, if the pose challenges you then you probably need it! In which case, do poses that build up to it, or do the pose a little at a time.

Yoga Snack

A nice break while you're watching TV; or sitting under a tree at lunch time.

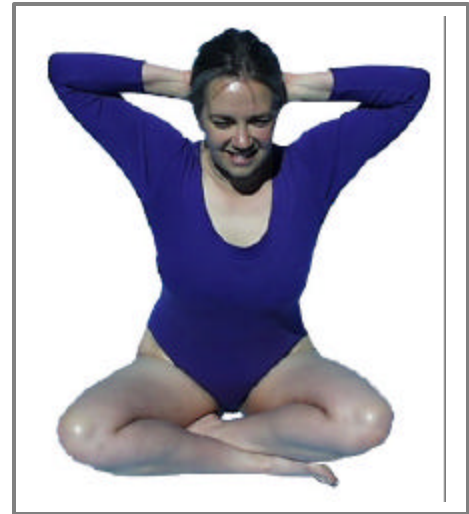


Start

Sitting with legs crossed
(or in lotus position if you can manage it)

Then

- ? Raise arms
- ? Lace fingers together behind your head
- ? Open your elbows (just until you feel a stretch in your arms)



Lower your body & arms to one side.
That is, bring your elbow down toward the floor.

Tip: aim for the piece of floor beside your hip, this will keep you from leaning forward.



Pause
Hold 1 – 2 breaths (or not at all)



Return upright.
Pause

Then stretch the other side.

Do 3 times on each side, back & forth.

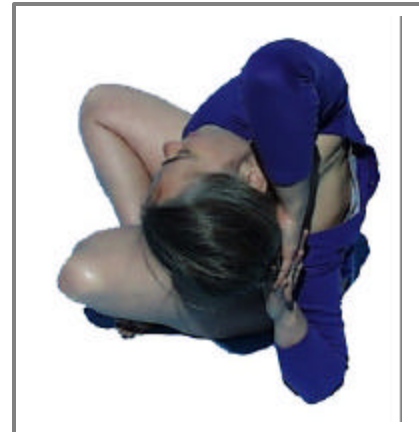


Details



Key Don't let your body drift forward when you're doing the stretch. Keep your elbow in line with your hip as you lower yourself down.

Key See that your body, your back, your arms and elbows stay straight, not slouched, the whole time.



Key Proceed slowly & with control.

Tip There will come a point with the stretch when you start to tip – where your body quickly slips the rest of the distance to the floor. Try not to let this happen. If that means that you don't make it to the floor, that's OK. By proceeding with control for the entire stretch, you will get the most benefit.

Safety Tip Don't pull down on your head with your hands. This stretches your neck out of shape and you'll easily result in neck strain or other injury.

Encouragement

You might only be able to stretch a little of the distance. Don't worry if you don't make it to the floor. That's not the point. The point is to work your body, build up your muscles and have a good stretch. If you get these benefits from going only part way down, you're getting the same work out as the yogi on the mountain top.

Discovery

The first time you do this pose, try experimenting with doing it wrong. This is so you can learn what it feels like when you drift off course, and so you'll know what it feels like to do the pose well.

1. After lowering your body down, drop your upper body a little bit forward. How does the stretch change?

You'll probably feel a lot less stretching in your side. (That also makes it easier to reach the floor, but, hey, that wasn't the point!)

2. Now adjust your position so that it's more correct. Have your elbow more in line with your hip bones. How does the stretch change?

3. Straighten up your body, line up your back, your arms and elbows. See how that improves the stretch?

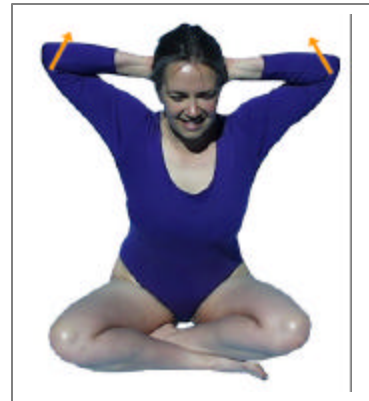
Breathing



Starting position
Breathe in
Breathe out, letting
your weight settle into
place.



Breathe in
Bringing your arms up
& lacing your fingers
behind your head

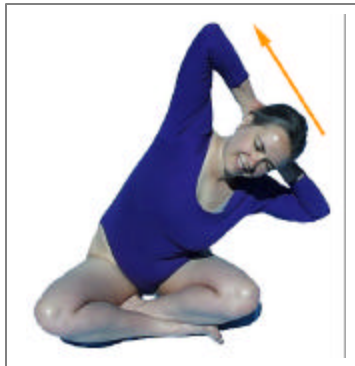


Breathe out
Settling your arms into
place, opening up
your elbows
Breathe in



Breathe out
Lowering your body to
the side

Hold 0 – 2 breaths



Breathe in
Returning upright



Breathe out
Adjusting your body
back into the starting
position.