

Balasana



Child's Pose

[buhl-AAH-suh-nuh]

Bala is the Sanskrit word for “child.” Balasana resembles the fetal position in the womb. This asana is very restorative and calming and evokes a feeling of safety and security.



DESCRIPTION

Balasana is a kneeling, prone position where the shins rest on the ground and the belly and chest lie on the thighs. The arms may be extended over the head and resting on the ground (often called Ancient Prayer Pose), or wrapped around the outside of the body with the hands resting beside the ankles. This pose calms the body and replaces energy after vigorous, challenging postures. It should be practiced as a counterpose after intense backbends and inversions.

ENERGETIC FOCUS

Second chakra (Svadhithana) creative energy, third chakra (Manipura) vitalizing energy, sixth chakra (Ajna) perceptive energy

FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS

Root into the shins and the tops of the feet. Anchor lightly onto the forehead or the palms.

BENEFITS

- Restores energy.
- Stretches and releases the low back.
- Relaxes the neck and shoulders.
- Stimulates digestion.

⚠ CAUTIONS

Knee pain—Practice with modifications or practice in a supine position with the knees drawn in toward the chest.

Intestinal discomfort—The pressure placed on the abdomen in this pose can exacerbate intestinal distress, so students should avoid this pose until the discomfort passes.

VERBAL CUES

- From a kneeling position, sink your hips down toward your heels. Feel the front of your thighs elongate as you soften your hips.
- Exhale and slowly fold forward from your hips. Relax your upper body downward so that your torso rests on, or between, your thighs and your head rests on the ground or on a soft prop under your forehead.
- Exhale and bring your hands back by your feet; alternatively, if it is more comfortable for your neck and shoulders, extend your arms over your head in Ancient Prayer Pose. In either position, feel your shoulders sink toward the ground as you relax your neck.
- If your arms are stretched overhead, breathe deeply and feel your side ribs expand. If your hands are beside your feet, allow the backs of your shoulders to soften so that your chest melts toward the ground. Take deep, slow breaths.

- With each inhalation, feel your shoulder blades move apart. As you exhale, allow your front body to sink completely toward the ground. Draw your tailbone gently down toward your heels to lengthen and stretch your lower back.
- Continue to focus on your breath.
- As you relax more deeply, adjust your hips and legs so that you are as comfortable as possible. You may want to widen the space between your knees for comfort. Imagine the entire front of your body descending into the support of the ground.
- Slow down and deepen your breath, feeling its softness. Imagine each breath opening your rib cage and lengthening your spine. Relax your neck and shoulders more and more.
- To exit this position, place your palms on the ground under your shoulders. As you inhale, slowly press through your arms and lift your torso upright.

ADJUSTMENTS

Feet—The feet should be relaxed; however, if a student experiences discomfort in the feet or ankles, instruct the student to curl the toes under. If this is not comfortable, place a small rolled towel or blanket under the fronts of the ankle joints. If the student's toes are pointed outward, kneel behind the student and gently rotate the feet so that the toes are aligned straight back or slightly inward.

Knees—To help the student relax more deeply, cue the student to move the knees a little farther than hip-width apart. This positioning opens the hip joints and often makes the student more comfortable, especially if he or she has a larger belly.

Spine—If the student's lower back is not convex (rounded), kneel to the side and place your hand (the one closest to the student's hips) flat against the pelvis with your fingers pointing away from the student's head. Place your other hand between the shoulder blades with your fingers pointing toward the student's head. Press down only enough to feel some traction in your hands. Keep your hands in the same spot but move them in a motion away from each other as the student exhales. This action lengthens the spine and is generally comforting to the student. Never push straight down on the spine! Another option is to stand behind the student's hips, facing away, and sit very lightly on the student's pelvis. Make certain that you connect at the pelvis—not higher, which would be on the low spine. Use this adjustment only if the student is free of knee concerns. In addition, this adjustment is best practiced in small-group or private sessions because it takes time and attention away from the rest of the class. When using either of these adjustments, ask if the student is comfortable with the amount of pressure you are providing.

Shoulders—If the student's shoulders press up into the ears, kneel at the student's side and place your hands lightly on top of the shoulders. As the student exhales, gently press the shoulders away from the ears and cue the student to elongate the neck. The student may need to lift the head slightly in order to reposition.

Breath—To help the student's breathing, kneel to the side and place one hand on the mid pelvis and the other between the shoulder blades, as in the spine adjustment. Instruct the student to breathe deeply into the hand at the pelvis and then move the breath up the spine into the hand at the shoulders. Ask the student to exhale in the opposite direction, from the shoulders down to the pelvis.



Adjustment: spine; breath.



Adjustment: spine.

MODIFICATIONS

Tight hips and knees—If the student is not comfortable with the knees fully flexed, place a rolled towel, blanket, or small bolster between the hamstrings and calves. It is fine if the student simply lifts the hips up away from the heels, but this generally does not allow the student to fully relax into the pose.

Tight low back—If the student's lower back does not round into a relaxing curve, place a folded towel between the upper thighs and belly. For some students, this modification allows the back to curve gently. If it does not bring a curve to the back, roll a blanket and place it under the knees. This modification lifts the front body slightly as it raises the fronts of the knees, which allows the pelvis to drop toward the ground.

Ancient Prayer Pose—Some students are more comfortable with the arms outstretched overhead rather than by the sides.

Tight shoulders—If a student has difficulty relaxing the shoulders, instruct the student to stretch the hands overhead in Ancient Prayer Pose and externally rotate the upper arms so that the backs of the hands rest on the ground.



Modification: Ancient Prayer Pose with shoulder external rotation.

KINEMATICS

Balāsana is essentially a resting and restorative posture that stretches the fronts of the shins and ankles, the front thighs, the hips, and the spinal musculature. With the arms resting alongside the body, the shoulder blades gently relax away from each other as the student focuses on deepening the breath. Because this is a passive pose, all the muscles should be relaxed. The muscles indicated in the following chart are those that are additionally stretched when practicing this pose.

Balāsana

Body segment	Kinematics	Muscles released
Foot and toes	Plantar flexion	Anterior tibialis, gastrocnemius, soleus, peroneals
Lower leg	Knee flexion	Quadriceps
Thigh	Hip flexion	Hamstrings
Hip and pelvis	Legs slightly abducted	Gluteals, deep external rotators*
Torso	Slightly flexed	Erector spinae
Shoulders	Slightly internally rotated if arms are at the sides	Rhomboids, trapezius, posterior deltoid, pectoralis
	Overhead extension	Latissimus dorsi, serratus anterior, trapezius, rhomboids
Upper arm	Relaxed in either position	Biceps brachii, brachioradialis, triceps brachii
Lower arm	Extended	
Hand and fingers	Relaxed	
Neck	Forward flexion	Splenius capitus and cervicis, suboccipitals, semispinalis, sternocleidomastoid

*Obturator externus and internus, gemellus superior and inferior, quadratus femoris, and piriformis.

When properly positioned in this asana, the entire body is relaxed; therefore, no muscle contractions are listed.