



Ustrasana
Camel

Ustrasana (Camel Posture)

Benefits: Camel opens the hips and releases the hip flexors, psoas, and some of the rotator muscles; opens the entire front side of the torso and sparks the emotional center of your body; it strengthens muscles in the back and shoulders; improves flexibility of the neck and spine and relieves backache.

Alignment: Stand up on your knees, knees and feet hip-width distance apart (approx. 6 inches). Put your hands on the back of your hips, fingers pointed toward the floor. Scoop your tailbone down and under and squeeze your buttocks, thighs, and hamstrings. Press your shinbones down while raising your heart high. Align the hips and thighs so that they are vertical. Gaze toward the wall behind you and breathe.

Beginners: If it is more comfortable for your knees to be a little farther apart, open them to 8 inches but keep feet only 6 inches apart. Keep your hands on the hips and drop your head back as far as possible, then bend the torso backwards slowly and push the hips forward with the help of your hands for support. Try to lift your chest toward the ceiling to open the heart and protect the lower spine.

Intermediate: Without moving the hips backwards, lower your hands one at a time, onto your feet. Hold the heel firmly, thumb on the outside, fingers pointed inward. Try to bring the heel of the hand onto the heel of the foot. Breathe through your nose and sustain this position for 20 seconds.

Advanced: With hands on your heels, roll your hips, stomach and thighs as close as possible toward the mirror. Feel a good stretch in the front of your body. On your way out of the posture, make sure to support your lower back with your hands, coming up the same way you went down.

Other Modifications: Come up on the balls of your feet. You can also keep your hands at your lower back, fingers facing up and pressing your sitting muscles down; then bend backward to a comfortable degree without reaching your hands to your feet. If it strains your neck to drop your head back, keep your chin tucked.

