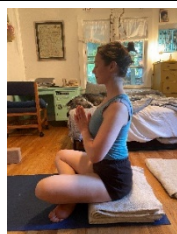


Building Courage with an Open Heart: Backbend Sequence

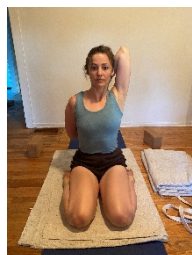
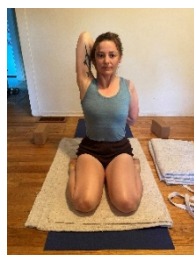
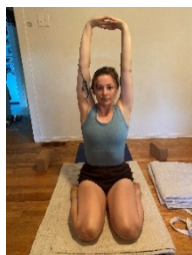
Seated and Supine Set

In this first section, the seated and supine poses prepare the upper back (dorsal spine), shoulders, and chest for backbends. Take a few breaths focusing on lifting and broadening the chest area, then a few breaths focusing on drawing the dorsal spine inwards to support the chest lift. Use the inhalation to support the lifting of the chest and the exhalation to take the abdomen deeper in towards the back body. These poses also stretch the quadriceps and open frontal groins for backbending asanas.

Repeat #2 – 4 at least twice on each side. As always, feel free to edit the sequence to fit your needs and ability.

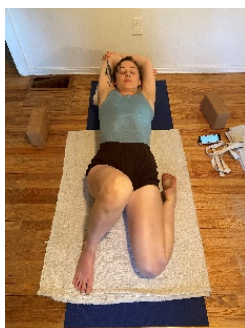


1. Sit for the invocation
 - Lift and broaden the chest on the inhalation
 - Maintain the lifted chest on the exhalation
 - Sit tall with a lifted spine

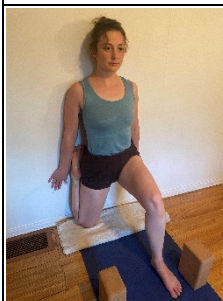


2. Virasana (with Baddhangulyasana then Gomukhasana Arms)
 - Lift the low back/sacral region upward
 - Move the dorsal spine inwards
 - In each arm variation, keep the chest broad and elevated

*Note: You could also do Baddhangulyasana arms between changing sides for the Gomukhasana Arms. Use a belt or towel for Gomukhasana arms, if needed.



3. Supta Virasana (one leg at a time in Virasana)
 - Use bolsters or blankets for support
 - Level the hips (add a little blanket under the non-Virasana buttock [knee up side] to help)
 - Use the inhalation to lengthen the side ribs and the exhalation to elongate the lumbar spine/sacrum away from the head
 - Keep the abdomen back towards the spine, especially during inhalation.

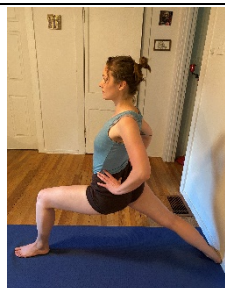


4. Quad stretch (with bed/couch or wall support)
 - Keep the hips level and parallel to the wall
 - Lengthen the low back/sacrum area towards the floor
 - Breathe calmly, even if it's intense!

*Note: Remember to always have a blanket under your Virasana knee. A washcloth between the wall and your foot is optional. Use the tall blocks to place the foot on the floor (knee up/non-Virasana leg).

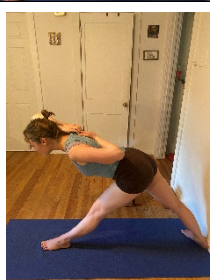
Standing Pose Set

In the next section, the standing poses further prepare the chest and upper back for backbends. Strong legs and stable hips are required for these asanas as well as backbends. Repeat each asana 2 – 4 times per side. These asanas can be done with the back heel on the wall (as shown), hands to the wall, chair support, or freestanding. Salamba Sirsasana (headstand) is optional; it is ok to do Adho Mukha Svanasana and move onto the next section.



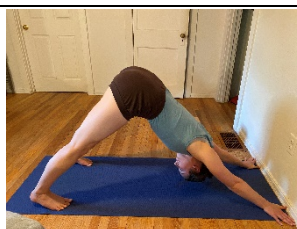
5. Virabhadrasana I

- Elongate the low back/lumbar region
- Lift and broaden the chest
- Pull the bent knee hip back and take the straight leg hip forward, while keeping the back leg strong and straight



6. Parsvottanasana (concave back, arms down or in Gomukhasana)

- Stabilize the hips by pulling the front leg (head side) hip back and taking the back leg (wall side) hip forward
- Move the shoulder blade area in and stretch the chest forward



7. Adho Mukha Svanasana (with wall and/or blocks under hands)

- Strengthen the legs and press the front thigh into the back thigh
- Move the shoulder blade area inwards
- Open the armpit area



8. Salamba Sirsasana (with or without wall)

- Move shoulder blade area (dorsal spine) inwards (away from the wall)
- Extend the lower back (sacrum/tailbone) upwards
- Strengthen the legs and stretch them upwards, from the inner groin to the inner ankle

Active Prone Backbend Set

The floor prevents overuse of the low back/lumbar spine. In these backbends emphasize arching the mid-upper back (dorsal spine) to achieve the back arch. Elongate the sacrum and tailbone away from the head.

Since most of the following asanas only have one side, repeat each one at least 3 times.



9. Bhujangasana (3 positions for hands; waist/low ribs, chest, forward/in line with head)
- Keep the shoulders away from the ears
 - Move the dorsal spine in to open and lift the chest area
 - Keep the legs on the floor; thighs internally rotated

* Notice how the different hand positions affect different regions of the spine



10. Salabhasana
- Keep the arms and legs level with each other
 - Extend the arms and legs away from the head side



11. Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (sliding hips forward, feet on blanket or towel)
- Maintain strong and gripped legs
 - Move the shoulders back and away from the ears
 - Lift and broaden the chest

* OPTIONAL: After Urdhva Mukha Svanasana, glide back with the blanket into Chaturanga Dandasana for an added challenge! Then lower to the floor.



12. Dhanurasana (hold outer feet or use a belt/towel to catch ankles)
- Strongly push the shins away from the head side
 - Move the shoulder blades in to lift the chest further



13. Parsva Dhanurasana (OPTIONAL)
- Keep pushing the shins away from the head as you move right and left from Dhanurasana
 - Maintain the lift of the chest

Supported Backbend Set

Hold the following asanas for 3 – 5 minutes, building up to longer holds. Keep the legs strong and extended. Use the inhalation to lift and broaden the chest, without lifting the abdominal area. Use the exhalation to deepen the abdominal area and lengthen the lower back and sacrum away from the head.



14. Salamba Purvottanasana (with bed or chairs)
- If using the bed, a rolled up sticky mat under your feet will help keep you from slipping
 - Wrap the thighs inwards and extend the legs



15. Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana (with bed or chair)
- Press the thighs strongly downward and rotate them inwards
 - Extend the sacrum/lower back towards the feet
 - Inhale and lift/broaden the chest

*Feel free to use support under the feet and/or belts on the upper thighs



16. Urdhva Dhanurasana (with chair or bolster support)

- Keep the elbows inward (use a belt!)
- Extend the sacrum/tailbone toward the knees
- Lift chest and hips evenly and simultaneously off the chair



17. Urdhva Dhanurasana (No chair; Optional)

- Follow the actions in #16
- Lift chest and hips upward at the same time



18. Bharadvajasana I (with block or chair)

- Gentle twist to relieve any back discomfort
- 4-5 breaths on each side

Salamba Sarvangasana with Backbend Benefits

Practice Salamba Sarvangasana close to the wall to support the inward and upward tailbone action necessary to balance in Salamba Sarvangasana. This also further opens and stretches the frontal groins. By bringing the shoulder blade area into the back, the spine is lifted and Salamba Sarvangasana becomes perpendicular to the ground. Spend some time touching the wall and working the tailbone action, then practice balancing for 2-5 minutes (or more).

If you're not practicing shoulder stand, skip ahead to Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (supported with blocks).



19. Salamba Sarvangasana (with wall)

- Move tailbone in and upward
- Move the shoulder blade area inward towards the chest
- Extend upward through the inner line of the legs

*Note: Practice taking one leg at a time off the wall or both legs at the same time.



20. Dropping back to Setu Bandha Sarvangasana from Salamba Sarvangasana

- Move your setup a little further from the wall
- Drop back to the wall from Salamba Sarvangasana
- Walk the feet further down the wall (as far as possible)
- Keep the hands closer to the shoulder blade area than the waist
- Maintain the tailbone in and sacrum area elongated towards the knees as you walk the feet down

*Note: It's better to avoid wearing a belt on the elbows for this one in case you need to come out easily.



21. Supported Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (with blocks or bolsters or other supports you have)

- Maintain the lifted chest
- Relax the face and throat
- Elongate the tailbone area towards the feet



22. Savasana (bolster or chair to support the knees/legs)

- Soften the groins
- Relax the face and throat completely
- Breathe softly and quietly