

# Fish Pose (Matsyasana)

**Fish Pose (Matsyasana)** is one of the most powerful chest-expanding and anti-slumping asanas.

*A fish must open its gills to breathe. In the pose, your ribcage takes on the appearance of vast fish gills, hence the name. Matsyasana fills the lungs with air, energises the calcium regulating parathyroid gland, strengthens the abdomen, improves the voice by opening the throat chakra, and relieves mental tension. A perfect practitioner of this asana can actually stay afloat in water quite effortlessly!*



Normally done after, and as a counter-pose to, Shoulder Stand (Sarvangasana), this pose also gives a backward stretch to the whole spine - the thoracic, lumbar and cervical areas.

For this reason, it's one of the best asanas to counter the negative, hunching effects of poor posture and too much computer work! The Asana does wonders for your respiratory systems; when you assume this position, your chest is stretched open and your bronchial tubes are widened to promote easier breathing. In time your ribcage will expand, and this will also encourage you to breathe more deeply. By lifting your chest and tucking your arms underneath your body, you will combat postural defects such as rounded shoulders and the cervical region of your spine, thus releasing pressure on your nerves.

Matsyasana is also a calming, opening posture. The breath should be taken deep into the lungs. Feel the ribs rise and fall as you inhale, exhale.

## Step by Step

- Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent, feet on the floor. Inhale, lift your pelvis slightly off the floor, and slide your hands, palms down, below your buttocks (arms straight). Then rest your buttocks/thighs on the backs of your hands (and don't lift them off your hands as you perform this pose). Be sure to tuck your forearms and elbows up close to the sides of your torso.
- Inhale and press your forearms and elbows firmly against the floor. Next press your scapulas into your back and, with an inhale, lift your upper torso and head away from the floor, arching the lumbar spine whilst lifting up and forward with



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the belly. Move from side to side and lift the elbows closer together. When comfortable exhale and gently the top of the head onto the floor. Depending on how high you arch your back and lift your chest, either the back of your head or its crown will rest on the floor. There should be a minimal amount of weight on your head to avoid crunching your neck.

- Keep your thighs active, and press out through the heels.
- Stay for 15 to 30 seconds, breathing smoothly.
- With an inhalation press down into the elbows, lift the chest up and forward, and gently raise the head to look at the feet. As you exhale lower your torso and head to the floor and relax into shavasana.
- If you are finding this pose challenging you can put some extra padding under the back of your head to help you until you gain some flexibility and strength.

## Benefits

- Increases lung capacity. This asana is named 'fish' because of the way the lungs are filled with air.
- Stretches the hip flexors (psoas) and muscles (intercostals) between the ribs.
- Asthma sufferers may well benefit - Matsyasana relieves spasms in the bronchial tubes.
- Massages the neck and shoulder region and helps correct rounded shoulders and poor posture.
- Counters stress and mental agitation.
- Regulates calcium (vital for strong bones and teeth) levels into the blood: the body's energy is centered on the parathyroid glands in this posture.

## Pointers to remember

- Hold the pose for up to 90 seconds. Beginners can aim for around 20 seconds - this is quite an intense stretch. It can also be useful to perform asana with the back placed on a thickly rolled blanket.
- Keep the body and knees straight and hold the feet together, without tensing them.
- Importantly, make sure the weight is on the arms and elbows, not the head.
- Experienced students can take the legs into Lotus (Padmasana). However, this is neither necessary nor desirable unless Padmasana can be done easily.

**One way to get the best out of life is to look at it as an adventure.**

