

Salamba Prasarita Padottanasana *Supported Wide-Legged Forward Bend*

7

BENEFITS

- Warms up large muscle groups and prepares the body for more subtle poses
- Opens the back of the body and quiets the deep pelvic organs
- Helps to relieve upper back, neck, and shoulder tension

PRACTICE WITH CARE

- Avoid this pose if you have sciatica or disc problems in your lower back.
- Avoid this pose if you have a pulled hamstring.
- Avoid this pose if you have a sinus infection or head cold.
- Take special care not to hyperextend your knees.



FIGURE 7.1

- Make sure the back of your neck is in flexion and not arched or sagging down.
- Keep the pressure of your head on the block at the very top of your forehead, about at the hairline.
- Do not lift your tailbone too much; this puts stress on the attachment of the hamstring muscles to the ischial tuberosities (sitting bones).
- Do this pose in the last month of pregnancy *only* if you put your hands on support about 12 to 14 inches from the floor; do not hold it for more than three to five breaths.

PROPS

- One sticky mat
- One to three blocks
- One metal folding or yoga chair with a horizontal seat (optional, see “For Teachers”)
- One firm blanket (optional)

SETTING UP

Spread out your mat on an even floor with space around you. Step onto the mat facing the long end. Stand with your feet wide apart; make sure the outside edges of your feet are parallel with the short edges of the mat (or the walls of the room).

Place at least two blocks in front of you on the floor. Place your hands around the tops of your thighs at the sides, with your thumbs facing backward. Drop your chin, inhale, and then with an exhalation, bend forward. Be sure to keep your vertebral column in its normal curves. When you do this, the back of your lumbar spine will have a slight arch (concavity), and your abdominal muscles will contract slightly to stabilize your spine from the front of your body. Make sure you are not “leading” with your ribs; keep your lower ribs in line with the top front of your pelvis. Your ribs should move neither forward nor backward but remain in neutral; in other words, they should be in line with the front of your pelvis.

As you approach the floor, put your fingertips on the floor directly underneath your shoulders while keeping your elbows straight and your spine almost parallel to the floor. Remember to keep your breath free. Using one hand, slowly place the

block(s) under your head so you can rest the top of your forehead at the hairline on the block(s). Use whatever height block formation works for you. Many students find that they can use a low block to support the head in this pose, but use the height that works best for you. Place your hands lightly on your ankles.

BEING THERE

Spend the first minute or so in the pose making sure you are comfortable. Do not attempt to make this pose a stretch; it is not about stretching. If you are flexible, drop your tailbone slightly toward your heels. This is the opposite of the movement of the tailbone in an active version of Prasarita Padottanasana. Tuck your chin well so the back of your neck is long and curves outward. Breathe slowly and easily; soften your jaw and drop your eyelids so your eyes are half-closed. Let the muscles in your back and shoulders soften and roll downward out of your pelvis and release toward the floor.

It may be necessary to adjust the height of the block(s) and/or the width between your feet to keep your spine in a receptive and gently curved shape as



FIGURE 7.2

your long leg muscles let go. If you feel more and more weight coming onto your skull, you can bring your feet closer together, lower the block height, or do a little of both.

As with the two previous poses, if you are a beginner, you may find the pose more relaxing if you place a stable folding chair against the wall (which is not shown in figure 7.2), cover the seat with a blanket, fold your arms on the seat, and rest your head between your arms. Remember to keep the back of your neck long and in flexion. Finally, be sure to stand on a sticky mat placed at 90 degrees to the seat of the chair to prevent your feet from slipping.

COMING BACK

After five to fifteen breaths in the pose, inhale and place your fingertips on the floor under your shoulders. With an exhalation, move your hands once again to the sides of your upper thighs, engage your abdominal muscles, use your hamstrings to pull down from your sitting bones, and come into a standing position. Do not do this movement slowly, but with a moderate speed. Be sure to maintain the normal curves of your spine while you rise. Once you are vertical, take at least two easy breaths before practicing your next pose.

FOR TEACHERS

Because this pose is so easy for experienced students, monitor carefully that they are not overdoing the forward bend part of the pose. The lower back should be in an even, outward arch, not a straight line. Additionally, observe your students from the side. Make sure they understand to keep the outer hip exactly horizontally aligned with the anklebone. Many students push the pelvis back as they go forward. If this is the case, gently invite them to move the pelvis forward to line up the hip and ankle. The shape of the pose has a profound effect on the nervous system. Softly rounded shapes help the student relax in the pose.