

Focus: Baby Back Bends.

Level: Fundamentals

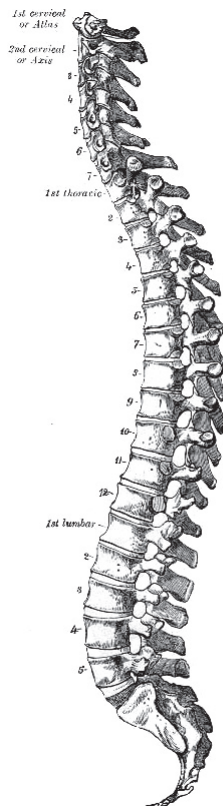
Theme: Rolling the sacrum and tailbone towards the heels

The Lumbar Curve

The spine has three curves: the lumbar curve, which curves into the body, towards the navel; the thoracic curve, which curves out of the body, away from the heart; the cervical curve, which curves from the back of the neck towards the front. Each of these curves is critical to the distribution of weight through the frame in a standing position, but often, as a result of habitual bad posture, injury or genetics, any one of these curves can become altered, either becoming a deeper curve or flattening out. This will then throw off the body's finely-tuned system of guide wires and pulleys, impeding the ability of some muscle groups to bear weight and causing others to overwork or become tight in order to compensate.

When performing a back bend, or backward extension, what happens so often if we are not vigilant, is that the lower back, the lumbar curve, takes the brunt of the pose and we feel crunched back there. There are two major factors that can contribute to this. The first is mobility of the upper back. The thoracic vertebrae are smaller and would, therefore, be more mobile if it were not for the rib cage, which can have the effect of binding up the middle and upper back, especially if the muscles there are stiff and lack tone. The second is length or shortness in the front of the thigh and in the hip flexors. Tight quadriceps and a tight psoas

(the major hip flexor which attaches to the lower back and to the inner thigh) will pull on the lower back, increasing the tendency for the lumbar curve to deepen and the vertebrae and muscles to compress.



Curves of the Spine

Body Actions

The primary body action that we will be working with in this practice involves the tailbone and the sacrum. By strongly rolling the tailbone/sacrum towards the heels and away from the lower back we will be tilting the pelvis so that the lower back elongates and broadens, relieving compression.

To briefly access this action, lie on the floor with the legs together. Observe the lower back and the pelvis. Observe the curvature of the lower back. Is it close to the floor, or completely up? Observe which part of the buttocks and pelvis are in contact with the floor. Is it the upper part, closer to the lower back, or the lower, closer to the thighs? Now, roll the tailbone towards the heels and observe how the body changes. You will find that the pelvis tilts so that it is more the upper part that rests on the floor. You will also find that the lower back drops towards the floor and broadens.

Even though this action will tend to become less clear as the poses progress and intensify, it is important to keep it in the forefront of your awareness.

The Practice

In this practice we will begin with two restorative poses to allow the muscles of the trunk, front and back, to soften and lengthen. We will then create freedom in the front of the thigh with lunges and Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I) to take some of the pressure off the lower back. From there we will move through a progressive sequence of backward extensions, often referred to as the “Baby Backbends”.

pose	props	set-up	instructions
Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose)	1 belt. 1 bolster (or blankets). 1 blanket.	Belt the legs. Lie back over bolster or blankets. Blanket under head.	Soften and release inner thighs, belly and chest.
Setu Bandha (Bridge Pose)	1 belt. 1 bolster (or blankets). 1 block.	Belt the ankles. Lie back over bolster or blankets. Feet on block.	Soften and release belly, chest and shoulders.
Lunge (back knee down)			Allow pelvis to sink forward and down. Soften rear thigh down and back towards knee.
Lunge (back leg straight)			Allow pelvis to sink forward and down. Press top of rear thigh up towards ceiling.
Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose)	1 belt.	Belt the legs. Lie flat on floor.	Soften and release inner thighs, belly and chest.
Lunge (back leg straight)			Allow pelvis to sink forward and down. Press top of rear thigh up towards ceiling.
Supta Baddha Konasana (Reclined Bound Angle Pose)	1 belt.	Belt the legs. Lie flat on floor.	Soften and release inner thighs, belly and chest.
Thigh Stretch at wall	Wall. Blanket.	Place one shin flat against wall with knee straight down on padding. Bring other foot forward and lift trunk if possible.	Roll tailbone towards standing knee. Pull belly in and up. Move waist back towards wall.
Virabhadrasana I (hands on hips) (Warrior Pose I)			Roll tailbone to back heel. Stretch back leg. Lengthen waist straight up.
Virabhadrasana I (Warrior Pose I)			Roll tailbone to back heel. Stretch back leg. Lengthen waist straight up.

pose	props	set-up	instructions
Supta Virasana (Reclined Hero Pose)	1 belt. Bolster/blocks/blankets 1 blanket,	Belt the legs so that they do not spread. Recline over support as necessary. Blanket under head	Without lifting hips, lengthen sacrum to knees Soften thighs. Lengthen and release them towards knees. Broaden upper back into support.
Shalabasana (Locust Pose)	1 belt.	Belt the ankles.	Press out against belt to stretch legs. Roll sacrum to heels. Broaden and lengthen upper back. Go long rather than lift high.
Shalabasana (Locust Pose)			Keep feet together. Stretch legs. Roll sacrum to heels. Broaden and lengthen upper back. Go long rather than lift high.
Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)			Press feet into floor. Stretch legs. Roll sacrum to heels. Broaden and lengthen upper back. Press hands back and elongate sides forward and up.
Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)			as above.
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)	2 blocks.	Place hands on blocks.	Press feet into floor. Stretch legs. Roll sacrum to heels. Broaden and lengthen upper back. Press blocks back and elongate sides forward and up.
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward Facing Dog Pose)			Press feet into floor. Stretch legs. Roll sacrum to heels. Broaden and lengthen upper back. Press hands back and elongate sides forward and up.
Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)	1 belt.	Belt thighs hip width or wider.	Roll sacrum to heels. Press thighs up. Press ankles back. Soften belly and chest.

<i>pose</i>	<i>props</i>	<i>set-up</i>	<i>instructions</i>
Dhanurasana (Bow Pose)			Roll sacrum to heels. Press thighs up, keeping them parallel. Press ankles back. Soften belly and chest.
Parshva Dhanurasana (Side Bow Pose)			Emphasize stretch of upper side of body.
Ushtrasana (Camel Pose)	Wall. 1 belt.	Do pose with thighs against wall. Belt knees hip width. Turn toes under.	Roll sacrum to heels. Press pubic bone into wall. DO NOT take hips off wall as you go into pose. Elongate up wall before going back.
Ushtrasana (Camel Pose)	Wall. 1 belt.	Do pose with thighs against wall. Belt knees hip width.	Roll sacrum to heels. Press pubic bone into wall. DO NOT take hips off wall as you go into pose. Elongate up wall before going back.
Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose)		Hands touching, feet touching.	Roll tailbone to heels. Round lower back (Pose is done here in this way to relieve lower back).
Uttanasana (with twist) (Intense Stretch Pose)		Feet hip width apart.	Roll tailbone to heels. Round lower back. Slide to one side without shifting hips. Repeat on second side. (Pose is done here in this way to relieve lower back).
Adho Mukha Vajrasana (Downward Facing Thunderbolt Pose)			Soften and broaden lower back. Hold pose for 1 or 2 minutes.
Parshva Bharadwajasana (Side Bharadwaja's Pose)	Bolster/blankets.	Sit in Bharadwajasana and lie to the side with trunk supported by bolster.	Soften and broaden lower back. Hold pose for 1 or 2 minutes on each side.
Viparita Kaarani Seal (Inverted Action Seal)	Wall. Bolster/blankets.	Rest pelvis on bolster and backs of thighs against wall. Roll shoulders down and tuck shoulder blades into back. Lift and open chest.	Soften thighs, hips and belly. Soften and broaden chest. Release throat and back of neck. Hold pose for 3 to 5 minutes.
Shavasana (Corpse Pose)	Bolster/blankets.	Bolster under thighs. Blanket under head and neck.	Soften thighs and belly. Soften and broaden lower back. Hold pose for 5 to 10 minutes.