

Yoga Tree of Boise  
Asana of the Month  
Sirsasana (pronounced "shear -SHAS-ana")  
Head stand  
King of all poses

Though Sirsasana, headstand, seems like a lot of work at first, and can certainly evoke fear at first, it is actually considered a restorative pose, typically performed near the end of a practice. Once you feel okay with the tenuous sense of weightlessness, the perfect but precarious point of balance, it is an opportunity to tap into a sense of deep calm, weightlessness, effortless. There is no strain anywhere.

Why do a headstand? Besides tapping into this blissful state, you get to experience overcoming fear and literally turn your perspective upside down. Inverting the body stimulates control mechanisms in the circulatory system that adjust blood pressure and positively affect the flow of cerebrospinal fluid. The lymphatic system is also stimulated. As Erich Schiffmann says, "The entire physical system, under control of the brain, is energized and nourished as the brain is washed clean and flooded with rich new nutrients. The mind clears, thinking improves, understanding ensues." You become rooted in the now.

How to do a headstand? It is best to practice under the guidance of an experienced teacher as you are putting a lot of weight on the tiny cervical vertebrae and incorrect placement of the crown's balance point or the arm's support could damage this delicate area. There are also several contraindications to headstands such as high blood pressure, retinal detachment, spinal injuries, etc. There are many other asanas that offer Sirsasana's benefits that do not put these populations at risk. That being said, follow these steps to enjoying a safe and satisfying, revitalizing but relaxing Sirsasana rush.

Step 1 - Arms. Kneeling on the floor, position your elbows directly under your shoulders. Triceps hug inward. Keep the inner & outer edges of the forearms, wrists and hands parallel. Maintain this throughout the duration of the pose!

Step 2 - Hands. Make a nest. Interlace your fingers & conform your hands as if holding a teacup, tuck the bottom baby finger next to the top baby finger so they are side by side. Your arms/hands should form a symmetrical, equilateral triangle. The top of the forearm (the radial side) is exactly over the bottom side. This triangle is your base of support...be sure it's a strong foundation.

Step 3 - Head/crown. Place the back of your skull in the nest you made with your hands. Then plant the center of your crown, not your forehead, on the floor. This point is straight up from your ears.....if you go too far forward, you will put the neck under strain...you will never feel weightless.

Step 4 - Shoulders. Learn to lift your shoulders away from your ears (lower trapezius). The strength of your shoulders, arms, and upper back will protect and take pressure off the neck. With your head in your hands and your knees & feet still on the floor, practice lifting and dropping the shoulders. This involves shrugging your shoulders up & away from the ears. Practice this a lot!

Step 5 - Hips. Lift your hips and walk inward toward your arm triangle as far as you can. Bend your knees and lightly touch them to your chest. Without lifting your feet from the floor, move your hips up & back in a slight dog tilt (forward pelvic tilt)..this will position them over your head so your spine is vertical, your center directly over the base of support that you made with your arms.

Step 6 - Core. Engage the core a lot, bend the knees and draw them up and over your hips. Take this step SLOW. Pause here....it's key to establishing your foundation of hips over the triangular base of your arms & the balance point of the crown.

Step 7 - Legs. Slowly straighten your legs. Keep your feet together so your legs move as one. Once up, feel as if you're squeezing a ball between your thighs and gently internally rotate them. Barbie Doll the feet (plantar flexion). You'll feel move from a tenuous to an even balance between the front & back body energy.

Step 8 - Balance it all. Find the weightless, effortless balance point by ensuring that you're observing all the previous steps.