

The Benefits of Being Upside Down



The abbreviated version: it keeps you young, body and soul. Have you been upside-down today? Now that we have that out of the way, let's look at the details.

When your body is topsy-turvy, the pressure of gravity is reversed, giving your heart, veins and arteries a rest. Blood flow to the brain and major organs is increased. Additional benefits include:

- Stamina, reduces fatigue and boosts energy
- Alleviation of symptoms of insomnia
- Alleviates hypertension
- Reduction in the occurrence heart palpitations and breathlessness
- Cures halitosis
- Strengthening of the lungs

- Stimulation of pituitary and pineal glands
- Improves functioning of thyroid and parathyroid (shoulderstand and plow)
- Increase of hemoglobin content in blood
- Relief of cold, tonsillitis, asthma, and bronchitis symptoms
- Stimulates digestion, relieves eliminatory problems and urinary disorders
- Can treat hemorrhoids and hernias (shoulderstand)
- Can treat prolapsed uterus, reduces uterine fibroids, ovarian cysts,
- menstrual cramps, flow regulation (if done between menstrual cycles)
- Facilitates lengthening of spine and improves alignment
- Stimulation of cardiovascular, lymphatic, nervous and endocrine systems

"In a 1992 Yoga International article on Headstand and the circulatory system, Coulter wrote: "If you can remain in an inverted posture for just 3 to 5 minutes, the blood will not only drain quickly to the heart, but tissue fluids will flow more efficiently into the veins and lymph channels of the lower extremities and of the abdominal and pelvic organs, facilitating a healthier exchange of nutrients and wastes between cells and capillaries." (Benefits of Inversions)

So, now you are totally motivated to be upside down, right? Now, where do you begin? There an

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entire category of yoga poses which are called “inversions.” An inversion is any pose where your hips are higher than your heart. To begin, you can access postures such as child’s pose, legs up the wall pose and plow pose. Begin working on your core strength and balance to eventually move into shoulderstand, handstand and headstand.

Lets begin with some of the more basic inversions: Child’s Pose, Downward Facing Dog, ½ Downward Facing Dog and Legs Up the Wall Pose.

Child’s Pose

Begin on all fours (hands and knees). Bring your toes together, and knees apart. Reach in front of you and slowly sit back on your heels until your head touches the ground or your mat. You may keep your arms overhead or bring them by your side, hands by your feet. Stay here as long as you like.

Downward Facing Dog

Begin on all fours. Make sure your body is aligned, joints stacking on top of joints. Push into your fingers and knuckles, feeling natural lift in the palm of the hand. Continue pushing into your fingers, curl your toes under, and slowly lift the hips upward and back. Keep your knees bent at first, focusing on a long line from the wrists, through the shoulders and spine to the hips. Slowly begin straightening the knees and dropping the heels. Find where your “edge” or limit of being

comfortable is, back off a little bit and hold just before that point for 3-6 breaths.

½ Downward Facing Dog (High Childs Pose)

Again, from all fours, keep your knees and hips where they are, slowly walking your hands forward, until your head comes close to the floor. Arms reach up, overhead, and there is, again, a straight line from your wrists, through your shoulders and spine, to your hips. Stay here 5-10 breaths.

Legs Up the Wall

Sit next to an open wall, so that one hip is on the wall, the other is not. Slowly twist, lifting one leg and then the other to rest on the wall, your upper body will come to rest on the ground. Adjust as needed: you can put a towel, bolster, or block under your hips; you may use a strap or belt around your calves, keeping your legs hip-distance; You may wish to move your hips closer or further away from the wall; perhaps you have an eye bag you can rest on your eyes. Stay here as long as you like, up to 10 minutes.

If you are more experienced in yoga, you may wish to do some of the more intense poses, perhaps using a wall. If you are new to yoga, please visit a nearby studio, or find our pose of the week article to assist you with these poses.

Please be safe, using supports and modifications to work your way into the full poses. Yoga takes time, and it is best to begin inversions slowly and

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consciously, building a solid foundation before attempting the more challenging postures.

*****Please do not practice the more intense inversions if you have high blood pressure, cervical spondylosis (headstand and plow), ischemia (plow), diarrhea (plow), backache, headache or a migraine. Also, inversions are not advised if you are on your menstrual cycle.**

SOURCES:

Iyengar, B.K.S., "Yoga: The Path to Holistic Health," Dorling Kindersley Limited, Dec 2007.

<http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/214>

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