

flight club

Move forward with balance and skill to fly fearlessly in Eka Pada Galavasana.

When you see an experienced practitioner lift and extend into the powerful Eka Pada Galavasana (One-Legged Balance), it's easy to see why this arm balance inspires awe: It looks like a bird balanced effortlessly on a branch. Finding this delicate perching point with the human body requires strength, flexibility, and skill. And it can invoke a healthy dose of fear, particularly of teetering forward and falling on your face.

This anxiety is perfectly reasonable. We're wired to avoid circumstances where we hurt ourselves, even if we're only bruising our egos. But one of the most compelling reasons to practice arm balances is to **push beyond perceived boundaries**. Not thoughtlessly, but consciously and skillfully. And herein lies the true beauty of this pose: What you have to gain

from the practice of Eka Pada Galavasana is not limited to achieving an impressive physical form. By facing your fears and skillfully moving forward in spite of them, you'll develop a healthy knowledge of your limitations as well as a deeper understanding of your potential.

The physical actions that the pose requires mirror this mental approach: Whether you balance with your torso and legs parallel to the floor, as the pose is taught here, or soar into the variation of the pose with your torso and extended leg flying high above your shoulders, the amount of weight in front of your elbows must match the weight behind your elbows. Easier said than done, as the floor beckons, and you imagine yourself toppling forward.

In the current variation of Eka Pada Galavasana, there is a greater demand on your overall strength and concentration. To develop the >



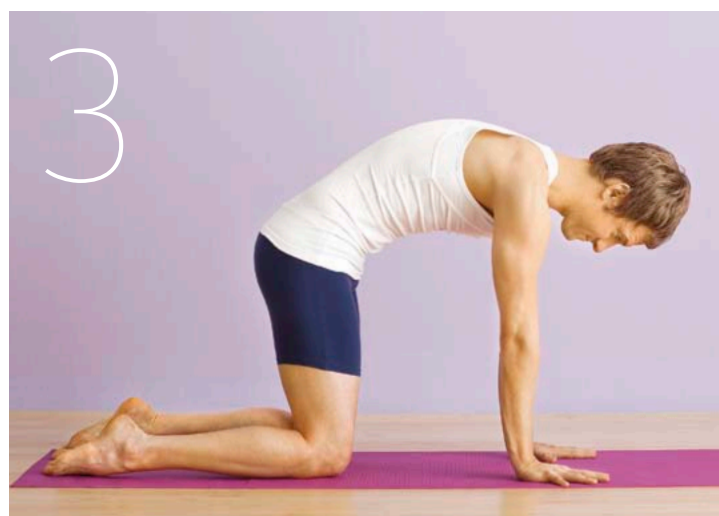
1 **Supta Padangusthasana** (Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose), variation

This pose mimics the shape of Eka Pada Galavasana without requiring the strength and balance. In addition to preparing your hips for the final pose, you'll practice the key actions of the sequence: broadening across your back body while simultaneously pulling your breastbone forward. Make sure to pull the outer edge of your left foot toward your outer knee. You'll protect the knee as you open your hips and learn how to work your foot so that it stays in place in the arm balance.



2 **Chaturanga Dandasana** (Four-Limbed Staff Pose), variation

Chaturanga is the blueprint pose for arm balances. It teaches you to engage your core and your legs while you lengthen your sternum forward. By learning to distribute your weight through your whole body and by fine-tuning your alignment here, you'll feel greater ease in Eka Pada Galavasana. You will strengthen and protect your shoulders as you imprint the physical memory of teamwork between the upper and lower body that's integral to practicing arm balances.



3 **Cat-Cow Pose**, variation

This version of Cat-Cow reinforces the primary actions that will help you move forward with balance and skill in the subsequent poses. Initially, use your inhalation to draw your sternum away from your navel and open the front body, and use your exhalation to engage the lower belly and open the back body. Then put the two actions together. Begin with the catlike spine of your exhalation, and root down with your hands to inflate across your upper back and tone your abdomen. Keep this basic shape, and then add pulling your chest forward on an inhalation. Notice how dynamic the pose becomes internally when you combine the two impulses.



4 **Bakasana** (Crane Pose)

Now apply the work from the previous posture in a continuous dance of balance and skill between pushing and pulling. Pull your chest forward to shift the weight out of your feet so you can lift them toward your buttocks. Then push the floor away to engage your core and apply the brakes, as needed, to your forward movement. Pull your sternum forward and up to straighten your arms. Then push down to get rounder across your upper back and more toned in your lower belly. Use the pulling action to venture forward and the pushing action to contain the momentum.



5 **Eka Pada Galavasana** (One-Legged Balance)

Like many other arm balances, this pose looks as though it requires tremendous upper-body strength. But, instead of focusing on your arms, put your energy into the outer foot action by vigorously pulling the left pinky toe toward your left knee. Combine this with the action of the shoulders and lifted leg from Chaturanga and the controlled forward movement of Bakasana. Together, these elements will allow you to balance the weight in front of your hands with the weight extended behind you, so that the pose becomes both lighter and more effortless than it might actually appear.

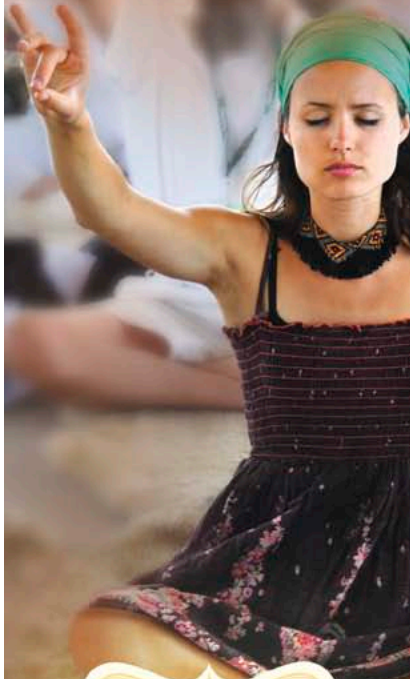
(benefits)

- Strengthens the arms and shoulders
- Tones the core
- Stretches the upper back
- Opens the hips
- Cultivates poise and balance
- Builds confidence

(contraindications)

- Wrist injury
- Shoulder or neck problems
- Pregnancy

Kundalini Yoga and Meditation



Meets You
Where You're At
Takes You Where
You Want to Go



a global community of living yoga

Find teachers,
centers & events

www.3HO.org

Brought to you by the members of the 3HO
International Kundalini Yoga Teachers Association

master class

➤ skill to manage this challenge, you'll engage two seemingly contradictory actions: pulling and pushing. Throughout this practice you'll explore pulling your sternum (breastbone) forward and lengthening the front of your body, while simultaneously pushing the floor away to engage your belly and spread across your back body. The combination of the two actions will allow you to move forward enough to balance, but also put on the brakes when you've gone far enough.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Warm up and prepare for this sequence with three cycles of Surya Namaskar A (Sun Salutation A), followed by two rounds of Sun Salutations that include Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge) and High Lunge to open your hip flexors. Continue with three to five cycles of Surya Namaskar B; then take 15- to 20-breath holds in Virabhadrasana II (Warrior Pose II), Utthita Parsvakonasana (Extended Side Angle Pose), and Garudasana (Eagle Pose). Lie on your back for a supine Sucirandhrasana (Eye-of-the-Needle Pose) on both sides, and you'll be ready for this sequence.

SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA

(*Reclining Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose*),
variation



This variation of Supta Padangusthasana allows you to practice the pulling action of the sternum without having to support your full body weight. It also opens your hips, hamstrings, and hip flexors in preparation for the final pose.

Begin lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet hip-distance apart and close to your buttocks. Externally rotate your left thigh. Cradle your left lower leg by taking your left knee in the crook of your left elbow and the arch of your left foot to your right inner elbow. Clasp your hands together along your shin. Actively flex your left foot, pulling your toes back toward your knee. Notice how much easier it is to pull your inner

foot toward your knee than it is to pull your outer foot. Actively peel the pinky-toe side of your left foot back with even more vigor than the big-toe side. This action is crucial in Eka Pada Galavasana, so you want to really focus on it here to imprint a physical memory.

Next, extend your right leg along the floor in front of you, releasing the inner thigh toward the floor so the quadriceps squarely face the ceiling. If your torso starts to curl away from the floor and your right leg does not release all the way down, place a block underneath your foot and another block underneath your head.

Take notice of how this pose is just like Eka Pada Galavasana—except that you are lying on your back! The left leg is externally rotated, with the shin supported by the arms and parallel to the collarbones; the left foot is flexing exactly as it will in the final pose; and the right leg is straight and in a neutral position.

Now it's time to investigate—within the safety of this supine position—the pair of actions that will help you move forward with balance and skill in Eka Pada Galavasana. Notice what happens as you hug your shin in deeply toward your torso: Your lower belly contracts and your back body expands. To do the final pose, you'll need to balance this flexion with a feeling of extension in your upper body. You'll extend your sternum away from your navel so that your chest opens and lifts rather than collapsing.

Play with balancing these actions here on your back for 10 to 12 breaths, then repeat on the other side. After you've practiced both sides, roll onto your hands and knees and step back to Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose).

CHATURANGA DANDASANA

(*Four-Limbed Staff Pose*), variation



Chaturanga Dandasana is a strength-building pose and a great preparation for arm balances. So, spend some extra time refining your Chaturanga in this

master class

sequence. The key here is to distribute the weight of the pose throughout your whole body and tap into the power of your legs. You might think Chaturanga is all about arm strength, but when you use your legs actively, it makes the pose lighter and more balanced. Practice this variation of Chaturanga, and learn to access the power in the lower body, one leg at a time.

From Down Dog, lift your left leg, keeping your hips level. Lift your left inner thigh toward the ceiling to maintain a neutral position in your leg. Press into the ball of your left foot to animate your inner thigh; then firm your right quadriceps and squeeze your right heel toward the floor. In a moment, your right leg will need to do the work of two, so begin to establish vitality in that leg now.

On your next inhalation, rock forward into Plank Pose as you continue to reach back actively through your right heel. Keep your right leg lively and your left leg several inches off the floor and toned. Lift both inner thighs toward the ceiling as you drop your tailbone toward the floor. These actions will make you compact at your center so that your lower belly is like a tray supporting your lower back.

Now revisit the lengthening action from the previous pose. Pull your sternum away from your navel to shift your energy forward. When you do this, keep your abdomen engaged so that your lower back doesn't slip into a backbend, and keep pushing into your right heel to keep your right leg strong. As you exhale, lower to Chaturanga, keeping your left leg hovering a couple of inches above the floor. Keep your shoulders at elbow height and your elbows pinned against the sides of your torso. Next, stack your elbows over your wrists, creating a right angle with your arms. Pause here, without dipping your shoulders below your elbows or splaying your elbows out to the sides. Hold for another complete cycle of breath. If it's hard to maintain integrity of alignment in your shoulders and arms, practice Chaturanga from your knees for a few weeks and then revisit this pose.

When you have held the pose for a complete cycle of breath, inhale into Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward-Facing

Dog Pose) and then back into Down Dog. Repeat Chaturanga on the other side.

CAT-COW POSE, variation

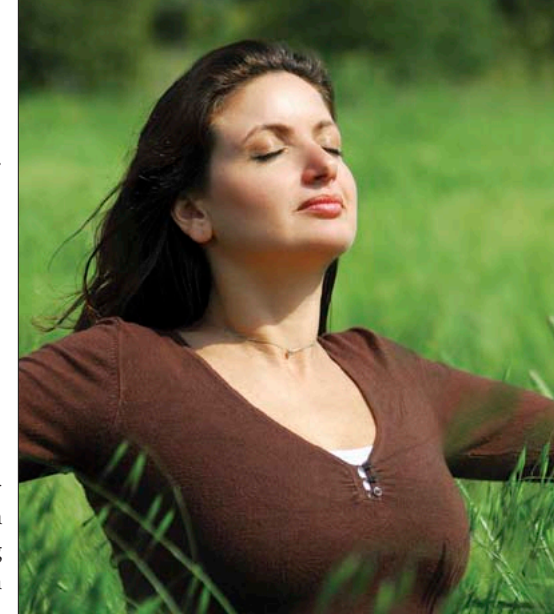


In this variation of Cat-Cow, you'll practice the rounding and extending action of the spine and the pushing and pulling sensation of the arms that are required in the final pose.

From Downward Dog, come to your hands and knees with your hands an inch or so in front of your shoulders. Root down evenly with each knuckle, especially the knuckles at the base of each index finger. Keep your arms straight. On your next inhalation, pull your chest forward and up, arching your back. Have your chin level to the floor and keep a slight tone in your lower belly so that the majority of the curve is in your middle and upper back rather than in your neck and lower back. Isometrically drag your hands back (they won't actually move on the sticky mat) to pull your chest through the gateway of your arms, and extend your sternum away from your navel. With your next exhalation, reverse the curve of your spine, rounding your back up toward the ceiling and dropping your head and tailbone toward the floor. Push the floor away with your hands, inflating across your shoulder blades and engaging your lower belly.

Repeat these movements with your next cycle of breath. This time, pause for a moment in the exhale position. Move your knees several inches closer to your hands so that your knees are in front of your wrists. Push the floor away with your hands to round your spine, and lift your belly toward your lower back as you press your upper back toward the ceiling. Maintaining this catlike spine, look slightly forward, and then start to pull your sternum away from your navel.

The pose won't look very different, but it should feel very different. By weaving in the action of lengthening the sternum



feel better.

a 5-day immersion for a
lifetime of healthy living.

The path to good health isn't always easy to find or follow. If you're ready to get educated, excited, and inspired, a Healthy Living program is your next step. Taught by leading health, nutrition, lifestyle, yoga, and fitness professionals, these transformative 5-day programs give you the tools to live every day more fully, have more energy, and create positive changes.

Summer program topics include yoga, Ayurveda, detox for health and healing, and weight loss, plus our signature all-natural meals. Call or go online to make your reservation—and get started on your path to better health.

Kripalu

healthy living
programs
transform your life.

exploring the yoga of life.

Stockbridge, MA 800.741.7353 kripalu.org/healthyliving

master class

forward, you've changed the internal experience of the pose. You are still pushing down through your hands to engage your lower belly and create space across your upper back, but you are also isometrically pulling your hands back to lengthen the front of your body, drawing your energy forward in space. By practicing these two actions, you'll create a physical imprint of the central dynamic that's required for the two arm balances in this sequence—producing the momentum to skillfully shift forward while maintaining the ability to put on the brakes before you go too far. Hold this position for five to eight breaths and then release into Balasana (Child's Pose).

BAKASANA (Crane Pose)



Now it's time to take the actions you've learned and apply them in Bakasana, an arm balance that is much more compact than the final pose.

First, take a moment while you are in Child's Pose to observe the position of your body. It's actually in a very relaxed version of Bakasana: Your knees are up near your shoulders; your feet are together, with your tailbone dropping toward your heels; and your upper back is broad. You'll want to re-create all these elements as you move into Bakasana.

Begin by extending your arms forward, with your hands shoulder-distance apart. Come onto all fours, and then step into a squat with your feet together about six inches behind your hands. Rise up onto your tiptoes, bend your elbows, and rest your knees against the back of your upper arms. Gaze slightly ahead of your hands on the floor. Lift your hips, move your weight forward, and stack your elbows over your wrists. Tone your lower belly and then shift forward in space just enough so that your feet become light and float up toward your buttocks.

Make sure to bring both feet off the floor at the same time. If you climb into

Bakasana one foot at a time, you'll set up off-kilter. You'll also risk missing the essence of the pose, which is this combination of skillfully moving your sternum forward while engaging your lower belly. If you're afraid to shift forward, place a blanket or a pillow on the floor directly in front of you for this pose and the next.

Once you're in the pose, push the floor away with your hands to inflate across your shoulder blades. Then pull your chest forward to lengthen your front body. Extending your sternum away from your navel is the "pull" that takes you forward in space. Rooting down into the floor with every knuckle and rounding your upper back toward the ceiling is the "push" that creates the tone at your center that will allow you to brake your forward momentum. Keep drawing your chest forward and releasing your tailbone toward your heels (just as you do in Child's Pose), getting more and more compact at your center as you create equilibrium between what's in front of your hands and what's behind. Hold the pose for five to eight breaths, and then release your feet back to the floor.

EKA PADA GALAVASANA (One-Legged Balance)



Now it's time to face the edge of the precipice and put together all that you've learned about moving forward with balance and skill. Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose), making sure you have a bit of room in front of you at the edge of your mat. Sweep your arms overhead and bend your knees, as though you were coming into Utkatasana (Chair Pose), but cross your left ankle over the top and to the outside of your right thigh. Your left leg is now in the same position as it was in the Supta Padangusthasana variation at the beginning of this sequence. Just as you did then, flex your left foot vigorously, especially the outer border.

With your next exhalation, start to shift your torso forward and place your

kripalu yoga teacher training

what does your potential look like?

The best yoga education provides a solid foundation from which students can grow into their highest potential. Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training prepares people to become successful yoga teachers by mastering the essentials of yoga. How do we do this? Our unique inquiry-based approach guides you to understand the technology and language of yoga on the mat, while learning how to incorporate the philosophy of yoga into the rest of your life.

**200- and 500-hour
Kripalu Yoga Teacher
Training certification
get online
today.**

dates, applications, and more
➔ kripalu.org/yogaschool



Kripalu

exploring the yoga of life.

master class

hands on the floor about six inches in front of you. Have your hands shoulder-distance apart and your elbows slightly bent. Next, come up on your right tiptoes and shift further forward so you can place your left knee high on your left triceps and hook your left foot around your right triceps. Vigorously grip your right upper arm with your left pinky toe. This will prevent your foot from sliding and will hold your left shin parallel to your collarbones so that you are perched on your arms like a bird perched on its branch.

Now, shift forward the way you did to come into Bakasana. Pull your chest through the gateway of your arms, bend your right knee, and lift your heel to your right buttock. You'll need to really extend your sternum away from your navel now to get enough weight in front of your hands to balance the weight of your hips and leg behind you. Keep your shoulders from dipping below elbow height—just as you did in Chaturanga—and then pause.

The tendency is to rush into straightening the back leg. But extending the leg

back too soon can have a seesaw effect that will ultimately pull you backward. Instead, take a moment to push the floor away with your hands, broadening across your upper back and engaging your lower belly to support your lower back. This will activate your core, creating the stability you need to shift further forward with control. Now that you've put on the emergency brake, you can ease forward without trepidation.

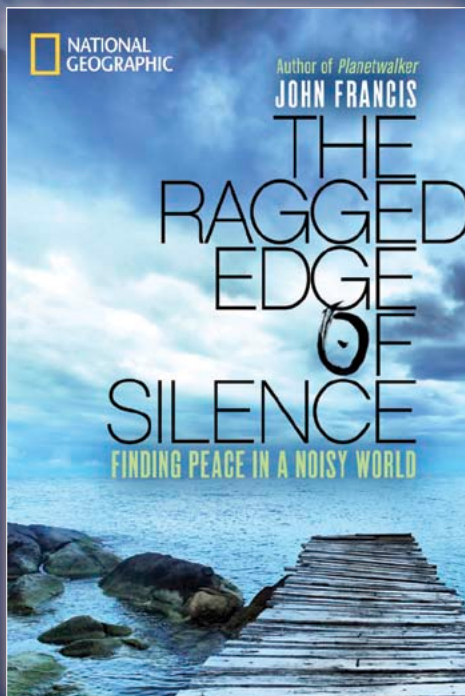
Slowly extend your right leg behind you, keeping the inner thigh lifted toward the ceiling so your leg stays in a neutral position. Revisit the active energy of your legs that you practiced in Chaturanga, and press back vigorously into the ball of your right big toe as you reach your chest forward, creating a taut line of energy. Hold for three to five breaths and enjoy the gracious feeling of flight! Then place your right foot on the floor and step your left leg back into Chaturanga.

Take a full vinyasa back to Tadasana, and then repeat on the second side. If you struggle with balancing in Eka Pada

Galavasana when you first experiment with it, don't despair. But don't walk away either. The beauty of this pose is in the opportunity to explore what challenges you, leading to a deeper understanding of both your limitations and your potential.

Use what you learn from practicing this sequence to identify what pieces of the puzzle are most difficult for you. Maybe it's the hip flexibility that's required, or the strength that's needed in order to hold yourself up. Maybe your challenge is the willingness to shift forward and peer into the proverbial abyss. Eka Pada Galavasana will help you cultivate a healthy relationship with exactly the part of yourself that you discover in your practice. Use your exploration of the pose to help you patiently and persistently push the envelope just enough to gradually venture into the unknown. ❖

Natasba Rizopoulos teaches internationally and is featured in Yoga Journal's Step by Step DVD series. For more information, visit natasharizopoulos.com.



BE QUIET

IT MIGHT DO YOU—AND THE WORLD—SOME GOOD.

Finding peace in a noisy world can be a challenging, yet life-affirming pursuit as author John Francis learned during his 17 years of self-imposed silence and 22 years of walking. In this extraordinary odyssey of self-discovery, the author invites readers to turn down the chatter in their own lives and arrive at a new level of appreciation of the planet and our place in it.

"In a noisy, chattering age, there could not be a more powerful story than this!"—Bill McKibben

"This book beautifully demonstrates the truly miraculous power of deep listening to transform and heal the pain in our hearts, our families, and our world."—Thich Nhat Hanh

AVAILABLE WHEREVER
BOOKS ARE SOLD
nationalgeographic.com/books

NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC