

# Utkatasana

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Utkatasana or Chair Pose is a valuable gift from the Hatha Yoga tradition to all of its practitioners. In Hindu mythology, the chair is actually a throne. When you practice this pose, imagine you are sitting on a throne rather than on any ordinary chair. When you connect your body, mind and breath to the strength of the Guru within you, insight and wisdom come forward. With that insight, you will feel more empowered, more aligned and at peace with yourself and with life.

Most people who take yoga classes experience chair pose as mostly a quadricep strengthener. It can seem like a strengthening pose for skiing or hiking rather than a pose that gives the feeling of taking a powerful seat. In reality, this pose works all of the muscles in the body very evenly, including the glutes, not just the quadriceps. You will know you have arrived when you don't feel it so much in the front of your thighs. Instead, you feel it everywhere!

Stand with your feet together or hip width apart. Either way is great and it is up to you to decide which feels best for you.

Lift the arches of your feet and squeeze your feet and shins to the midline.

Taking your groins back, bend your knees as low as you can go until you have a lumbar curve at L-5, S-1. Check this with your hand to make sure. This is muscular energy and inner spiral. Imagine you have placed a very heavy weight or responsibility on your lap and keep the weight moving down through your feet. This will stimulate organic energy to flow downward from the pelvic focal point.

Many people try and do a posterior tilt of the pelvis at this point, they tuck, scoop or lengthen their tail. That is unnecessary and ultimately not a helpful idea. If you keep your groins back to the point of having a curve at L5-S1, strongly pull your belly up and in, and make your thighs heavy, you will feel a lengthening of the tailbone without the posterior tilt. This will support your lower back while also giving you the freedom to extend your spine up and out of the pelvis.

Now, use more muscular energy to pull in or down at the base of your ribcage, still keeping the L5-S1 curve. Everyone is different with regard to this action. People who have very mobile ribs need to pull them in a lot and others may not need to think so much about this cue. We want to allow the spine to have full extension, like a backbend, but we do not want to disconnect at the solar plexus. This is outer spiral and organic energy moving downward. If you practice this way, you will feel the glutes fire naturally, without having to squeeze them, just from taking your groins back this far and pulling in the lower belly as much as you can. The tricky part here is continuing to breathe normally. The lungs are higher up and it is possible to train yourself to breath and engage your lower ribcage simultaneously.

Finally, draw the sides of your throat back and lengthen your skull from the base upward which is skull loop. Extend your arms straight up through your fingers with your ears between your biceps. Imagine you are holding a block between your hands to keep your elbows straight and the energy moving through your fingers. This is organic energy moving upward.

Breathe normally and hold the pose for five breaths if possible.

For many of us, it takes several tries to get this pose to look and to be this strong. It is a psoas challenge and our postural habits are deeply ingrained. Most of us will need to repeat it a few times to become warm enough to shift our patterns. Do give yourself a few chances to increase your flexibility with your strength. Don't expect this pose to be at it's very best the first time you try it on any given day.

Use this pose to your full advantage by practicing it daily. Feel your power, take your seat and be at peace with your life.

