

SARVANGASANAM

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Shirasanam and its closely Sarvangasanam, hold the pride of place among various asanas. Yoga teachers and practitioners, ancient and modern, have a lot to say about these postures. Even a novice experiences the tonic effects of Sarvangasana on starting the practice. Medical practitioners and researchers interested in Yoga give considerable importance to these asanas and study the effects on the whole system. One should include Sarvangasanam in the daily practice for sure.

It is common knowledge that in the normal erect posture, the main organs of perception—ears, eyes and the brain do not get a copious supply of blood as they are situated above the heart. Again, when we breathe normally, which is partly diaphragmatic, the vital organs as liver, spleen, kidneys, diaphragm etc., get pressed and displaced from their position—albeit, to a small extent. According to Yogic theory, disease is due to the displac-

ement of vital internal organs and muscles and the yogic practice is resorted to bring them to their original positions. The Rishis have sought to remedy this situation by adopting many topsy turvy postures, of which Shirasanam and Sarvangasana are the foremost.

SARVANGASANAM

It is one of the most difficult postures as one has to prepare the body, especially the neck, before starting on the practice. Dwipadapeetam

and Urdhwaprasritapadasanam are the two postures which prepare the body for Sarvangasanam. Sarvangasana as the name implies tones up all centres, nerves, organs, joints and muscles. The technique mentioned hereafter is not for absolute beginners, but for those who have practised the asanas mentioned in the previous issues and have attained a certain proficiency in staying in the postures with the proper Yogic breathing described earlier on.

METHODOLOGY STEP 1

Lie flat on a soft mat, keeping the legs stretched out, feet together, ankles close, knees together, place the arms along the body and entire palms on the ground.

STEP 2

Exhaling, slowly raise the legs, pressing the palms and back, neck and head, without bending the knees, until the legs from the hip are straight up. This is Urdhwaprasrita Padasanam. Stay there



for a few breaths. Then ex-
haling, raise the legs further
up, lifting the hip and the
back from the ground.

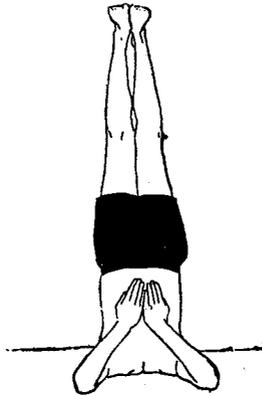
STEP 3

When the whole trunk is
raised and up, place the palms
behind the back, thereby sup-
porting the body with the
palms. The chest is pressed
against the chin, which cov-
ers the neck pit, between the
collar bones, thereby ensuring
that the body is not tilted to
either side. This also ensu-
res Jalandharabandha. The
body is straight. After a few
breaths, adjust the palms as
low as possible, until, say
they are supporting the floa-
ting ribs. The elbows should
not be spread far and the
ideal position is to keep them
about the span of the shoul-
ders level. After a few more
breaths, slowly and delibera-
tely stretch the back, the spi-
ne, hip, thigh and calf mus-
cles, the relaxed knees, the
ankles and the feet so that
the toes are also pointed. The
eyes are closed and the visi-
on is directed towards the
middle of the eyebrows (Bhr-
umadhya drishti). This is
Sarvangasana (Refer to sketch
1). It is better to keep the
full face of the palms on the
back (Refer Sketch 2) rather
than holding the side of the
ribs with the thumb pressing
in as is the normal practice
and tendency. One should
attempt to stay in the posture

for at least 5 minutes, which
could be achieved gradually,
with practice.

The breathing is through
the throat constriction which
produces a hissing sound.
There is no deliberate attempt
to do retention of breath after
inhalation, but it may be
attempted after exhalation.
After some practice when
the posture is steady and
the waistline is brought
down to a better proportion,
one may attempt the Moola-
bandha and Uddiyanabandha,
whose beneficial effects are
enhanced with the help of
gravity.

After staying in the posutre
for required length of time,
on inhalation, return to start-
ing position, without raising
the head and in a rolling mo-
tion. It will be nice to feel
the stretching in each of the



vertebrae as one returns to
the starting point.

BENEFITS

Sarvangasana tones up the
system, and many who start
the practice of this asana feel
its beneficial effects, within
a short time. One starts
feeling light, joints become
supple and muscles are in
better tone, all round,

Its effects on the thyroid
and parathyroid have been a
matter of study, and is of con-
siderable help to certain ca-
ses of hypothyroidism. There
is a good return of venous
blood to the heart and there
is a significant drop in the
blood pressure in the legs
after 5 minutes of practice.
The neck and back get a
copious supply of blood.

People suffering from respi-
ratory ailments, especially
Asthma and bronchitis res-
pond well to Sarvangasana.
A medical doctor has hypo-
thesised that the posutre if
done for up to 3 minutes or
so, seems to help act as
bronchodilator. Further, due
to gravity, there is a better
draining of bronchial secreti-
ons and it helps relieve
greatly those suffering from
sinusitis and bronchial
congestion.

The cerebro spinal fluid
circulation is increased, and
hence there is all round toni-

ng up of the entire nervous system.

It keeps the spine supple, and when done with the vinyasas, the spine could be exercised to the fullest extent. As mentioned, thyroid gland is well massaged and its arterial supply enhanced. The gland improves its functional capacity within healthy limits and its internal secretions are important for the proper metabolism and growth of the body. The larynx also gets massaged and it could be that the asthamagenic area below the glottis is exercised and gets normalised. The sympathetic and the entire spinal cord are toned up. The blood supply to the chest, and the organs is increased. Varicose veins tend to disappear. It has tonic effect on the testes, ovaries and pelvis by removal of congestion. Gastro intestinal diseases also are treated. Liver and spleen



also could be exercised with gravity and the Bandhas. The leg muscles, the sluggish knee joints and the stubborn hip joints become suppler in course of time. Some of the important variations tend to enhance the effects of Sarvangasana. A few are mentioned below.

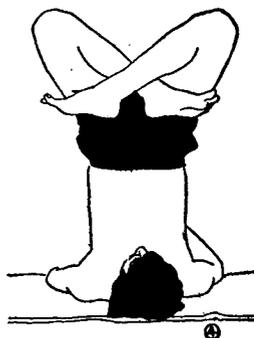
NIRALAMBA SARVANGASANAM

After remaining in Sarvangasana for some time, slowly exhale and by gently taking the legs a little further, raise both the arms. Stay for a few breaths. One should gaze at the middle of the eyebrows. The arms should be stretched, so also the legs. Refer sketch 3.

This Asana helps to correct indigestion and reduce waist line. According to our Acharya, if one could practice this late in the evening for fifteen minutes, one will get insomnia cured and will enjoy good sleep. People who are on their feet for a long time—sportsmen and athletes—will feel the asana exceedingly soothing. Pregnant woman may do this up to the end of first trimester. Those who suffer from frequent nocturnal emissions would also benefit.

URDHWAPADMASANAM

After remaining in Sarvangasana, slowly exhale, and



place the left foot on the right groin and then the right foot on to the left. Stretch the crossed legs straight up and stretch the back and pelvic region. Do a few breaths. Refer Sketch (4). Repeat with flexing the right knee first.

PINDASANAM

Proceed from Urdhwapadmasanam. On exhalation, bend and lower the crossed legs from the hips toward and then over the head. Slowly release the hands from the back and clasp the crossed legs, gripping



one wrist with the other. The is Pindasana or Foetus pose Refer to sketch (5).

These two asanas make use of the gravity effect on the knees and hip, which may not be the case in normal upright position. The Padmasana and the subsequent

bending to Pindasana help work on the spine, back and the stomach further. The benefits mentioned for Sarvangasana are enhanced. Breath will be short, but after some time it will stabilise. These are fairly advanced postures and may be attempted

only after one feels steady in Sarvangasana and Niralamba Sarvangasana.

Shirsasana and Sarvangasana are to yoga as are head and heart to an individual. Yes, they improve physical and mental well being.

