

Plank Pose

Kumbhakasana

koom-bahkAHS-anna

Kumbhak = breath retention



Plank is a basic pose but don't let its simplicity fool you! Used in both yoga and sports, many will recognize it as one component of Sun Salutation or the up position in a push-up. Breath retention comes into play as we hold our breath briefly before we Chaturanga or move into a low-position pushup. Practice Plank to build your stamina. It also strengthens the back and abs, which are important for spinal support and good posture.

How to do it

1. Start in Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-facing Dog). Then inhale and draw your torso forward until the arms are perpendicular to the floor and the shoulders directly over the wrists, torso parallel to the floor.
Alternatively, you can start on your hands and knees with your wrists directly under your shoulders. Tuck your toes and step back with your feet, bringing your body and head into one straight line.
2. Press your quadriceps up toward the ceiling while lengthening your tailbone toward your heels. Contact your abs - you don't want a sway back. Keep your neck aligned with your back and keep your gaze forward.
3. Hold for 30 seconds or longer. To release, slowly lower onto your knees, then press back into Child's Pose.

Do:

- keep your shoulders aligned directly over your wrists.
- keep the space between your shoulder blades wide while broadening across your collar bones. This action helps to prepare you for deeper arm balances, like Crow Pose.
- tighten your abs
- keep your elbows soft by engaging your biceps and triceps, creating a "micro-bend" in the joint.

Don't:

- allow your hips and butt to sag too low or poke too high - it's important to keep your body in one straight line, from shoulders to heels.
- lock your elbows - doing so can lead to hyperextension and injury.
- hunch your shoulders. Extend them so they're away from your ears.

Benefits

- Builds endurance and determination
- Tones all of the core muscles of the body, including the abdomen, chest, and low back.
- Strengthens the arms, wrists, and shoulders
- Strengthens the muscles surrounding the spine, which improves posture

Contraindications

- History of degenerative low back problems
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

Variations

There are a number of variations you can do to make Plank easier or more challenging.

If you aren't strong enough for full Plank yet, try lowering your knees to the floor (Half Plank). Be sure to keep your head and spine in a straight line, lengthen your arms but don't hyperextend them or lock your elbows.

For a tougher challenge try one of these variations:

- Raise one leg parallel to the floor, pressing through the raised heel and lengthen through the crown of your head. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds, exhale the foot to the floor, then repeat with the other leg for the same length of time.
- Lower yourself to your forearms. Remember to keep your abs tight and engage your glutes so your back doesn't sway.