

Camel Pose

Ustrasana
(oosh-TRAHS-anna)
ustra = camel

Camel is a backbend pose and one of the 26 postures of Bikram Yoga.

It's a great "heart opener" for experienced practitioners and flexible beginners. It keeps flexibility in the lower back, shoulders and hip flexors and strengthens the abs and quads.



How to do it

1. Kneel on the floor with your knees hip width apart and your shins and tops of your feet pressed firmly to the floor.
2. Rest your hands on your lower back, placing the palms on the top of your buttocks with your fingers pointing down. Press your front thighs back while lightly pressing your tailbone forward toward your pubis. Inhale, pressing the shoulder blades against your back ribs and lifting your heart.
3. Lean back, keeping your head up, chin near the sternum and your hands on the pelvis.

If you are an advanced practitioner, reach back for your feet, keeping your thighs on the floor. Or you can hold your left ankle with your right hand and your right ankle in your left hand.

If you are a beginner, twist slightly to your right so you can put your right hand on your right foot. Return to neutral, then twist slightly to the left to place your left hand on your left foot. If you aren't able to touch your feet without constricting your lower back, turn your feet so you're resting on the ball of your feet and your heels are raised.

If this is still difficult, put a block just outside each heel and place your hands on them.

Do:

- lift the front of your pelvis up toward the ribs
- keep the lower spine as long as possible
- press your palms firmly against your heels with your fingers pointing toward the toes
- turn your arms so the crease of your elbows face forward

Don't

- let your front ribs aren't pointing toward the ceiling
- extend your neck or drop your head back; try to maintain a neutral position
- squeeze your shoulder blades together

Benefits

- Stretches the entire front of the body
- Stretches the deep hip flexors (psoas)
- Strengthens back muscles
- Stimulates the organs of the abdomen
- Improves spinal flexibility.

Contraindications

- High or low blood pressure
- Migraine
- Insomnia
- Anyone with severe back problems such as Lumbago
- Chronic knee or neck injury