



## HEALING SEATED POSES:

# Downward Facing and L-Shapes

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This article discusses three variations of seated poses that have great healing benefits for a number of conditions, including pregnancy, menses, menopause, fatigue, fever, cough, cold, headache, esophageal and gastrointestinal disorders, high blood pressure, anxiety, nausea, and recovery after a long-haul illness, such as COVID-19. To achieve these health benefits, each of the three variations should be done in each seated pose in a sequence.

The seated poses are *Upavistha Konasana*, *Baddha Konasana*, *Virasana*, *Swastikasana* (or *Padmasana* if possible), and *Dandasana*. The variations are downward facing (*Adho Mukha*), upright (*Samaashrayi*), and reclined (*Upaashrayi*). The latter two are referred to as L-Shapes because of their similarity to the cursive L.

Each seated pose should be first practiced in the downward facing (*Adho Mukha*) version with the torso bending forward and the spinal column moving from back to front. This position balances the central nervous system and, among other things, nourishes the vagus nerve that directly connects the gastrointestinal tract and the brain. This position also enhances back body breathing and promotes a relaxation response.

The student next does the posture in an upright (*Samaashrayi*) position with the spinal column supported from the sacrum upward. The support accentuates the back to front movement of the spinal column. The student should lift and fully expand the chest and allow the abdominal organs to “fly up” toward the head with an *Uddiyana Bandha* effect.

Finally, in the *Upaashrayi* position, the student reclines backward at an angle onto a support, increasing the back to front movement of the spine as much as possible while otherwise resting the musculoskeletal and other systems of the body.

Forward, upright, reclined—that is the order for each seated leg position. The sequence of the individual seated leg positions can vary. Not all have to be practiced in one session. However, each seated position brings different effects on the groins and the extent to which the groins can release to help lift, stretch, spread, open, and increase circulation to the basin of the pelvis and to the pelvic and chest organs. Each pose similarly will have different effects on the movement of *Pranic* energy upward in the body to enhance healing.

**CAUTIONS:** In the case of heavy bleeding or extreme cramping during menses, the *Adho Mukha* positions are not advised. If there is low back pain when bending forward or backward, avoid these positions. Use discrimination to determine if only one of the seated shapes—forward, upright, or reclined—should be practiced.

Each position should be held one to five minutes. If there is restlessness or depression of the mind and/or body, hold for one minute. Hold longer if capable.

Here is a detailed description of the recommended sequence with prop setups.

### 1. *Adho Mukha, Samaashrayi, and Upaashrayi Upavistha Konasana series — downward facing, upright, and reclined seated angle pose series.*

**PROPS:** A Viparita Dandasana bench with one to three bolsters (trial and error will reveal the number needed) horizontally positioned on top. A rope can be wrapped onto the rung of the bench for use when in the reclined position. Figure 1.1 shows this set-up with two stacks of chumbals, the largest on the bottom and the next smaller size on top, side by side to sit upon. A belt is attached to the vertical post on the side of the bench to use later for *Baddha Konasana*.



Figure 1.1

If a bench is not available, use a folding chair against a wall with the seat facing out and a sticky mat folded on top of the seat (Figure 1.2). The front of a couch may also be used as a substitute. Position a sticky mat vertically away from the bench, chair, or couch. Place a second sticky mat horizontally from the bench, chair, or couch.



Figure 1.2

Figure 1.2 shows the chair with a sticky mat folded on the seat and a bolster across. Position a block(s) on the seat of the chair from the bolster to the wall to keep the bolster from slipping. Also, position a second bolster upright from the floor to the seat of the chair and position a slanting plank horizontally against the front legs of the chair to keep the props from slipping back to the wall. Place one to two small folded blankets or a bolster in front of the vertical bolster. A belt can be buckled around the front legs as an alternative to a slanting plank. A belt can also be attached to the top of the backrest of the chair to use later in the *Upashrayi* position.

Regardless of whether you are using a *Viparita Dandasana* bench, a chair, or a couch, place a chair, *Setubandha* bench, or *Halasana* box in front of the blankets with additional bolsters and blankets handy.

Have two blocks within reach. Have all the props ready for going forward, upright, and reclining variations.

**Adho Mukha position:** Sit with the legs spread apart in *Upavistha Konasana* with the sacrum against the support as snuggly as possible. Align the outer heels and small toes upright. Bend forward only to capacity so the back will not round and accordingly the back chest is moving to the front chest. Add a vertical bolster to support the torso if the hips and hamstrings are tight, or if it otherwise feels more restful to do so. Place a bolster or small folded blanket on the bench to support the forehead.

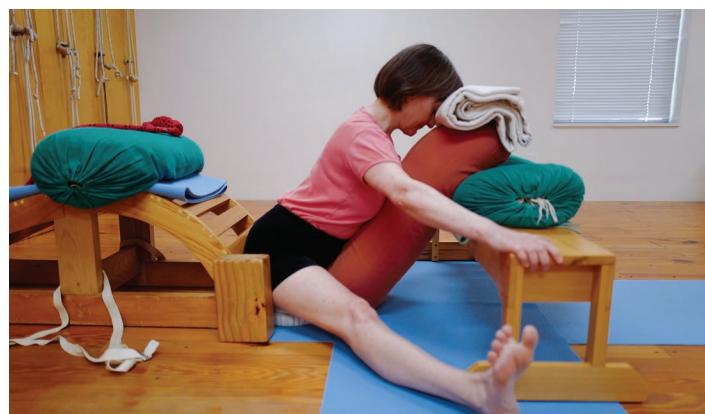


Figure 1.3

Figure 1.3 depicts *Adho Mukha Upavistha Konasana* with the *Viparita Dandasana* bench supporting the sacrum, the chumbals under the buttocks, and a *Setubandha* bench with a horizontal bolster across the bench. A second bolster is positioned vertically, and a small folded blanket is placed on top of the vertical bolster. If there is knee discomfort, position a support under the calves such as a small chumbar, or a rolled washcloth or small rolled blanket behind the knees. If using a chair, the arms can first hold the top of the back of the chair to help lift the chest and move the spine upward and forward and then relax the hands on the bench or bolster. For those who are capable, bend farther forward on a bolster or two without the bench or chairs.

**ACTIONS:** Firm the front of the thighs down and to the hips. Extend the back of the legs to the floor and toward the heels. Descend the kneecaps evenly and expand the back of the knees to the floor. Lengthen the inner thighs to the heels. Move the outer feet and outer sides of the legs toward the hips. Maintain the lift of the front spine by first using the pressure of the arms to lift and spread the chest. Then lessen the efforts, but maintain the shape. Relax the back of the head toward the face. Observe the breath and release the intercostal muscles

from back to front on the exhalations. The abdomen should lengthen toward the chin. Focus the breath in the back body. Use the hands to lift the torso up to go to the next pose.

**Samaashrayi position:** Maintain the legs in *Upavistha Konasana* and readjust the buttocks and sacrum to be firm against the support behind them. Place the hands on the blocks to help lift the torso, then rest the hands on the blocks. Adjust the bolster horizontally behind the back to help move the back chest forward and upward, and to spread the chest.



Figure 1.4

Figure 1.4 shows *Samaashrayi Upavistha Konasana* with one bolster across the back. Figure 1.5 shows three bolsters to support the back, neck, and head when more support is needed.

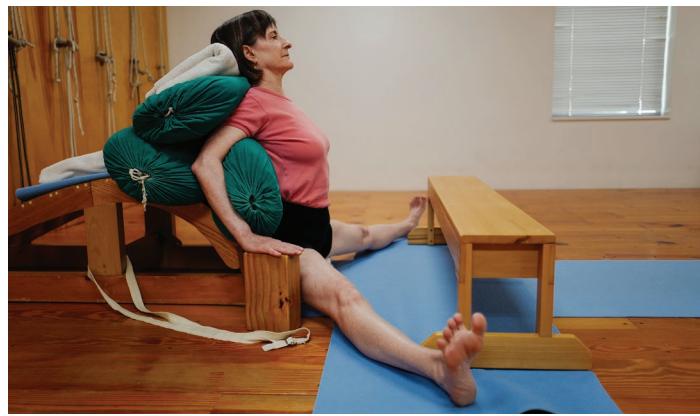


Figure 1.5

**ACTIONS:** As above and additionally, press the legs and the hands down to lift the torso. Lift the chest and sternum away from the waist. Lengthen the pubis and naval up. The shoulders should remain back and down. Move the back ribs upward and forward. Lift the cervical spine and gaze softly forward. Then relax the hands while maintaining the other actions.

**Upaashrayi position:** The bolsters may be repositioned. If possible, turn the bolster vertical and recline back. Use a bolster or folded blanket to support the head. If a rope or belt is available, have it on the bolster within easy reach. Hold the hands to the rope with the palms facing each other and pull on the rope to further lift the chest, stretch the abdominal organs up and, if possible, separate the chest from the abdomen so the waist narrows.

Figure 1.6 depicts *Upaashrayi Upavistha Konasana* with one bolster vertical. Depending on the practitioner's capacity, increase or reduce the props supporting the back (Figure 1.7 with a broad pillow) or eliminate the props altogether if the practitioner can lie comfortably back on the bench without them (Figure 1.8). A three-fold blanket or slanting plank may be positioned across the dorsal spine to aid the movement of the back toward the front body and to spread the chest.



Figure 1.6



Figure 1.7

**ACTIONS:** Maintain the actions of the legs and use the arms to help lift the chest and separate it from the abdomen. The hands may also rest on the blocks (Figure 1.9). Observe the breath. Use normal inhalations to move the back ribs upward to the front ribs and use exhalations to soften the diaphragm and abdomen.



Figure 1.8



Figure 2.1

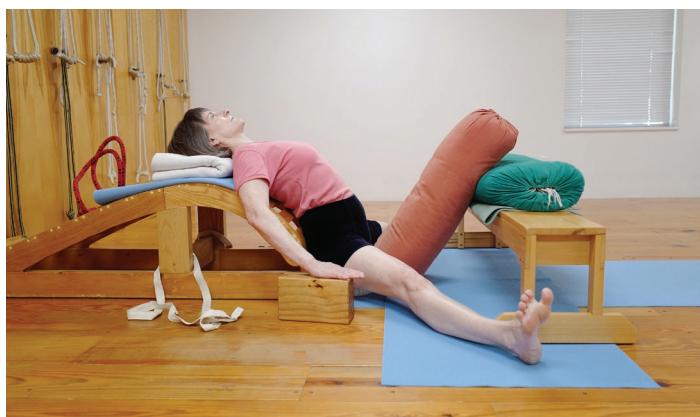


Figure 1.9

Keep the eyes open if anxiety and/or depression are present. Use the hands to lift the chest and sit upright to reposition the legs for the next pose.

## **2. Adho Mukha, Samaashrayi, and Upaashrayi Baddha Konasana series — downward facing, upright, and reclined bound angle pose series.**

**PROPS:** As above with additional support of belts attached from the bench to the head of the shins. If needed, sit higher to release the groins with blankets under the outer thighs/knees.

**Adho Mukha position:** From the previous pose, bend the knees and join the feet to *Baddha Konasana*. Position the buckled belts around the head of the shins and pull the belts tightly. If needed, support the outer thighs with blankets. Alternatively, the feet may be held in with a belt buckled around each leg as close to the hips and feet as possible. If the knees are uncomfortable, place ropes or belts behind the backs of the knees. Bend forward with support. Figure 2.1 depicts belts from the head of the shins held back to the vertical bench support. A plate weight may be positioned against the toes to keep the feet from slipping.

**ACTIONS:** Relax the inner thighs and lengthen them towards the knees. Move the outer thighs to the hips and move the outer femur heads towards the tail bone. Use the leverage of the arms to adjust the front of the spinal column upward and the back ribs inwards. The abdomen should lengthen. Then lessen the efforts, observe the breath in the back body, and rest. Use the hands to sit upright and prepare for the next position.

**Samaashrayi position:** Adjust the buttocks/sacrum firmly against the bench or alternative prop. Adjust the bolster(s) across the back to lift and spread the torso/chest (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2

**ACTIONS:** Press the hands on the blocks to lift the chest. Move the shoulders and trapezius down and maintain this action. Widen the collar bones and sternum. Spread the skin between the shoulder blades and lift the dorsal spine up and in towards the sternum. Maintain a separation of the chest from the abdomen and lessen the effort of the hands and arms. Gaze softly forward. Observe the breath. Maintain the leg position for the next variation.

**Upaashrayi position:** Recline back with the same support used in *Upavista Konasana*. Lift the chest and allow the abdomen to “fly up” to the chest, to create an *Uddiyana Bandha* effect, and to allow the waist to become narrow. Hold the rope to enhance the lift. If there is anxiety/depression, keep the eyes open and soft. Otherwise, close the eyes and relax (Figure 2.3). Use the hands to lift the chest to sit upright and release the legs to *Dandasana*.



Figure 2.3

### 3. Adho Mukha, Samaashrayi, and Upaashrayi Virasana series — downward facing, upright, and reclined hero’s pose series.

**PROPS:** As above with additional support for the knees if they are compromised in bending fully. Ropes or other spacers (small chumbals, rolled head wraps, folded belts, etc.) can be positioned behind the knees. Two to three stacked blankets can be placed under the shins with the feet on the floor if needed to protect the ankles or further help the knees (Figure 3.1). Alternatively, place a three-fold blanket(s) partway under the buttocks and part way up on the bench. Sit higher with more blanket support under the buttocks if needed. Use additional bolster/blanket support for the torso and head if the back is rounded when bending forward and/or to further make the knees comfortable. If the knees or ankle joints are too compromised, skip this pose as well as *Virasana* and *Upaashrayi Virasana* and finish with the *Swastikasana* and *Dandasana* series.

**Adho Mukha position:** Sit with the knees together and feet outside the hips with the props described above and bend forward as earlier. Alternatively, join the big toes, separate the knees apart, and bend forward on a vertical bolster on the floor.



Figure 3.1

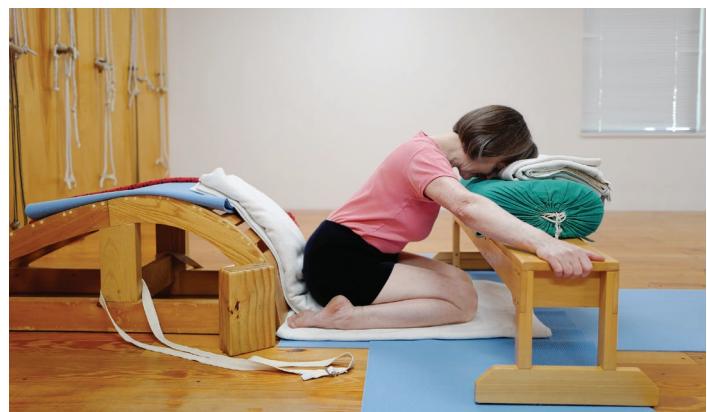


Figure 3.2

Figure 3.2 shows the three-fold blanket under the buttocks, with the head resting on the bolster/bench and the hands on the edges of the bench.

**ACTIONS:** Allow the spine to move from the back towards the front while the abdomen lengthens toward the chin. Observe the breath in the back body and release the back farther toward the floor on the exhalations. Relax the back of the head toward the floor; soften the mouth cavity; completely surrender and be quiet in the pose. If there is anxiety/depression, position the chin forward and open the eyes and gaze softly forward. Use the hands to sit upright for the next position.

**Samaashrayi position:** This is the classic *Virasana* seated with the knees together and the feet outside the hips. Use props to make sure the knees and ankles are comfortable.

Figure 3.3 shows one bolster horizontal to spread and lift the chest. The hands are supported on blocks.

**ACTIONS:** Maintain the outer ankles in and release the inner top thighs, the groins, toward the floor. Sit higher if these actions are not accomplished. Prepare for the next position.



Figure 3.3

**Upaashrayi position:** Lie back on the support and adjust the bolsters to allow the back to recline comfortably (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4

**ACTIONS:** Focus on the inhalations to maintain the lift of the back chest up and forward toward the front chest. Maintain the eyes open if anxiety/depression are present. Otherwise, close the eyes and rest deeply. Use the hands to lift the chest and sit. Release the legs to Dandasana and prepare for the next seated pose.

#### 4. Adho Mukha, Samaashrayi, and Upaashrayi Swastikasana (or Padmasana) series — downward facing, upright, reclined fortunate pose (or lotus pose) series.

**PROPS:** As above with additional blanket support between the knees and feet.

**Adho Mukha position:** Cross the right leg first, then the left under the right. Bend forward to capacity as described above. Remain with the same leg crossed first for all three positions. Then change the cross of the legs and repeat all three positions for the same amount of time (Figure 4.1). If it is preferred and appropriate, bend forward solely on a bolster vertical for the torso.



Figure 4.1

**ACTIONS:** As above. Use the hands to sit up to the next position.



Figure 4.2

**Samaashrayi position:** Sit upright with the sacrum touching the bench firmly. Add more bolsters or blankets if needed to achieve the L-shape of the spine (Figure 4.2).

**ACTIONS:** As above. Prepare for reclining.

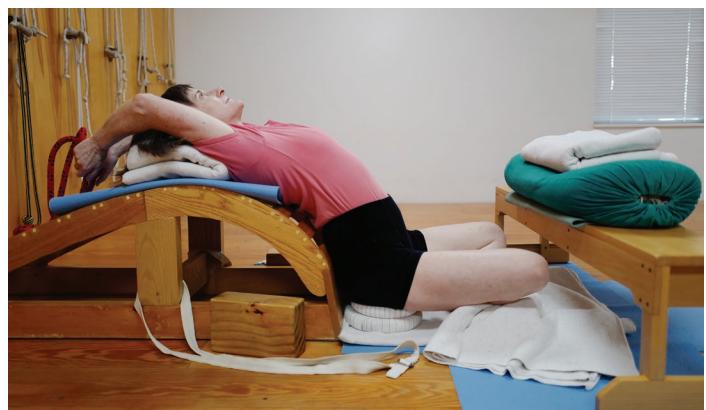


Figure 4.3

**Upaashrayi position:** Recline back as before (Figure 4.3).

Actions as before. After repeating the cycle with the opposite cross, release the legs to *Dandasana* before going on to the final seated pose.

### 5. *Adho Mukha, Samashrayi, and Upaashrayi Dandasana series — downward facing, upright, and reclined staff pose series.*

**PROPS:** As above, per need.



Figure 5.1

**Adho Mukha position:** From the previous pose, sit in *Dandasana* with the feet hip-width and bend forward. A plate weight can be positioned against the heels to maintain the sacrum against the bench (Figure 5.1). If the body is stiff or very unwell, support the torso with a vertical bolster as depicted in *Upavistha Konasana*.

**ACTIONS:** As described above.



Figure 5.2

**Samaashrayi position:** Sit upright with the hands on the blocks or other desired support. A weight may be placed on the thighs to descend the legs and help ascend the torso (Figure 5.2).

**ACTIONS:** As above. Prepare for the next variation.



Figure 5.3

**Upaashrayi position:** Recline back with the necessary supports (Figure 5.3). This concludes the series.

Please go to [www.loissteinberg.com](http://www.loissteinberg.com) to download the free video of a demonstration of L-shapes. Refer to Geeta S. Iyengar's *Guide to a Woman's Yoga Practice* and *Iyengar Cancer Book* for further detailed instructions and depictions.

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Lois Steinberg, (Ph.D, CIYT Level 4, C-IAYT) has four decades of extensive studentship with the Iyengars at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Pune. Lois is the director of Iyengar Yoga Champaign-Urbana in Illinois. She is the author of numerous books and articles. She has served on the IYNAUS board and Certification Committee and continues to serve as an assessor.

