

Arm balance workshop

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Purpose

- gain experience with a variety of arm balance poses encountered in yoga
- understand of how to execute and progress in each of these poses
- ideas for how to incorporate arm balance into a holistic yoga practice

Poses

Warm-up: wrists

1. Pushing forward

- Muscular activation to stabilise the shoulder: serratus anterior

Crow

Preparation:

- scapular push-ups (on knees, in plank)
- leaning forward in plank

Cues:

- push from the shoulder blades
- slowly lift the toes off the floor

Progression:

- lean against a wall
- straighten arms
- move knees up on the arms
- take knees off the arms, tuck into the body
- straighten back

Application:

- during vinyasa, before jumping back

Side crow

Preparation:

- Chaturanga
- mobility: Dandasana with forward-bend and twist

Cues:

- foot gaze to the side
- slight push up, active fingers

Progression:

- lean hip onto the elbow
- soften the lean onto the elbow
- start with bent knees
- straighten knees
- lift the upper leg

Application:

- transition from Padottanasana, and rotated extended side-angle

Flying splits

Preparation:

- Chaturanga, with a knee over the elbow
- mobility: extended hand-to-big-toe pose

Cues:

- foot gaze to the side
- tension in the back leg: straighten the body
- chest out

Progression:

- straighten leg
- move elbow out from under the hip

Application:

- transition from warrior, extended side-angle, downward-dog

Peacock

Preparation:

- prone boat (Salabhasana)

Cues:

- keep breathing!
- press arms into the side (activate pectorial muscles)
- lean forward
- tension in the whole body, very active legs
- third-eye gaze

Progression:

- less weight on the toes

- lift the toes off the floor
- one-arm peacock

Application:

- transition from downward-dog
- strengthens the diaphragm, develop intra-abdominal pressure - core stability

2. Pushing down

L-sit

Preparation:

- hip flexors, quadriceps:
 - standing leg lift
 - boat
 - seated leg lift
- upward dog - shoulder depression

Cues:

- lean back

Progression:

- use blocks (arm vs. upper body length matters)
- Lolasana (bent and cross legs)
- straighten legs
- lift feet to the ceiling (v-sit)
- jump into, jump back

Application:

- from Dandasana
- in between Navasana (boat)

3. Pushing up

Handstand

Preparation:

- feeling (proprioception):
 - lying on the back/front, arms extended overhead: full body tension
- mobility: overhead extension
 - downward dog
 - dolphin
 - bridge
 - dancer/pigeon
- working on the fear-of-falling

- cartwheels
- kicking up: against a wall, choose a front foot (dominant jumping foot)

Cues:

- point the toes: create tension in the legs
- squeeze legs together
- third-eye gaze to the floor (avoid “lifting” the head)
- active fingers
- use tension in the front and back of the body to pull yourself into balance
- straight arms

Progression:

- straddle
- press to handstand
- lower into crow or flying splits

Application:

- As a transition between left- and right-hand-side poses, e.g.:
 - warrior to warrior
 - half-moon to half-moon (yoga cartwheel)

Reflections

- arm balance is truly *balance*
- requires dedicated and continuous practice to build strength and technique
- transition from downward dog to chaturanga to upward dog and back as a solid method for building strength
- can be a source of frustration due to the difficulty
- should therefore be used with an accepting attitude, and in the right amount, so it does not compromise the entire practice
- arm balance is fun, intense, exiting, uplifting
- can contribute to enhancing concentration and intensity during a practice