

# How To Do Sirsasana (Headstand) Step By Step

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Salamba Sirsasana (headstand) is one of the main asanas that form the nucleus of an Iyengar Yoga practice. B.K.S. Iyengar describes it in his book “Light On Yoga” as being “the king of all yoga poses”. Headstand, or one of its variations is included in virtually every Iyengar Yoga sequence. Someone with an established home practice will be working with the pose on a daily basis.

Despite its importance, care must be taken not to rush quickly into practicing this pose. Headstand is best learnt once a solid foundation has been established in other preliminary poses. A student will then be taught the pose in clearly defined stages that build strength, confidence and technical understanding. This post aims to highlight these stages and clarify the actions and techniques that can be learnt from them.

See also the companion video to this post, *How To Do A Headstand – Weekly Intermediate Class 18* in the [Weekly Classes](#) section of YogaSelection.

## STEP 1



This variation is an ideal starting point when learning how to do a headstand. The objective here is to build strength in the upper body so that you are able to support your body weight whilst in an upside down position. In addition to strength you are learning techniques that help your shoulders to lift. When you get to the stage of stepping up the wall you are also

gaining familiarity with being in an upside down position. Note that the head is completely off the floor with these variations.

**Key Instructions:** Interlock your fingers and have your elbows shoulder width. Begin with your knees placed on the floor. Straighten your legs and lift your pelvis up without dropping your shoulders. Press your forearms down to lift your shoulders up. Walk your feet closer to your elbows without your shoulders leaning forwards. To step up the wall, ensure that your elbows are a legs length away for the wall. As you step up the wall lift your pelvis upwards and back towards the wall. Once both feet have come to the wall press your heels into the wall and lift your thighs upwards.

## STEP 2





This variation continues to build strength and technique. The block teaches you how to contain the part of the upper back that is most likely to collapse in headstand and place strain on the neck. Note that in this variation your head is still completely off the floor.

**Key Instructions:** The trick to positioning the block yourself is to hold the block against the wall with your hands whilst having both elbows 10cm away from the wall. Once you straighten your legs the block will be wedged in position between the wall and your upper back. At this point one hand at a time can slide down to the floor so that you can interlock your fingers. Lift your heels up and walk your feet in so that your hips begin to sit more directly over your shoulders. As you press your forearms down turn the outer armpits away from the wall. This will ensure that your shoulders spread outwards as they lift upwards.

### STEP 3





You are now ready to begin kicking up into the full upside down position. It is important that your head is still completely off the floor at this stage. Learning to kick up independently will take time for most people. Initially it is a good idea to put aside all ambition of getting all the way up. Instead, focus on a controlled hopping action where you kick off and land back to the floor on the same foot. With this approach you can incrementally get higher and higher at your own pace. Once the leading heel makes contact with the wall you are ready to think about bringing both of the legs up.

**Key Instructions:** Ensure that the knuckles of your interlocked fingers are in contact with the wall. Ensure that your elbows are directly under your shoulders. Raise up your pelvis and walk your feet closer to your elbows. Make sure that the leading leg is straight at the knee. Bend the opposite leg and use it like a spring to kick up to the wall. Transfer your body weight from the kicking foot into the forearms as you kick off. If you do not make it all the way up land back down to the floor with the same foot that kicked off. If you do make it all the way up stay in the pose for five even breaths. Slide your heels as high as possible up the wall and lift the back of your pelvis upwards towards the ceiling.

#### **STEP 4**





At this point you are ready to begin placing the top of your head on the floor. It is important that you establish exactly where the top of the head is in order to correctly align your neck. The neck retains its natural curvature but lengthens upwards to full capacity. The arranged blocks support the upper back ensuring a light contact with the head to the floor. This allows you to become familiar with having the head to the floor without putting strain on your neck. The placement of the hands on the sides of the block helps your shoulders to lift and broaden. It is possible to kick up into the full inversion from this position, but keeping your feet on the floor and learning how to lift your shoulders is a hugely beneficial step in progressing towards headstand.

**Key Instructions:** Make sure that your blocks are balanced and stable. Place the top of your head to the floor with the back of your skull a couple of centimetres away from the bottom block. Position your hands on the outsides of the block. Your fingertips will wrap around the ends of the block. Press the block firmly into the floor with your thumbs. Ensure that your elbows remain shoulder width as you straighten your legs and walk in with your feet. The top block will be securely positioned between your upper back and the wall. As you remain in the pose turn your outer armpits away from the wall to ensure lifting and spreading in your shoulders.

## STEP 5





You are now ready to work with a full headstand. Initially this is a pose that you are holding only briefly. As your experience grows so will the amount of time that you can comfortably stay in the pose. One minute is a good initial goal, but eventually you will find that the benefits of the pose come best with a five to seven minute stay. Once you are confident with this pose using the support of a wall, the next stage is to begin working with free balance away from the wall.

**Key Instructions:** Check that your hands are making a cup shape that roughly moulds the back of the skull. When you place your head to the floor check that the back of your skull lightly touches the fleshy base of each thumb. Keep the inner wrist aligned with the outer

wrist. Press both elbows down with even pressure as you kick up. Once up, lift your shoulders upwards, lift the back of your pelvis upwards, lift the insides of your legs upwards, lift your inner heels and big toe bases upwards.

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