

Importance and Benefits of Ardha Matsyendrasana in Daily Life

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is the science of life. It plays an important role to prevent and treat the disease. Ayurveda specifically deals with mind body balance. The main part of it is Yoga and Asana. Yoga provides us a simple remedies, facile skills and procedure of good health. Asana gives physical and mental power and tone the body-mind for further exercise. Ardha Matsyendrasana is often referred to as the Half Lord of the Fishes Pose. This Asana strengthens spine, digestive system, urinary system, reproductive system and stretches the Hips, Shoulders, Neck. Practicing this Asana helps to relieve stress and tension that is trapped in the back.

Keywords: Yoga, Asana, Ardha Matsyendrasana, Half Lord of the Fishes Pose

1. Introduction

Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes Pose) is named after the great yogi *Matsyendranath* who founded *Hatha Yoga*. The English name, Half Lord of the Fishes Pose, comes from the Sanskrit words '*Ardha*' = 'half', '*matsya*' = 'fish', '*eendra*' = 'king'. This *Yoga* pose has other variations and can be referred as Half Spinal Twist Pose or *Vakrasana* (which means twist). This *Yoga* pose usually appears as a seated spinal twist with many variations, and is one of the twelve basic *Yoga* poses (*Asana*) in many systems of *Hatha Yoga*. In this *Yoga* pose the spine gets its maximum twist at the upper back with the thighs placed over each other and with the support of the arms the torso gets its twist

Common name	<i>Ardha Matsyendrasana</i>
English	Half Lord of the Fishes Pose
Level	Intermediate
Position	Sitting
Chakra	Solar Plexus (<i>Manipura Chakra</i>) , Sacral Chakra (<i>Swadisthana Chakra</i>) , Root Chakra (<i>Muladhara Chakra</i>)
Dosha (Ayurveda)	<i>Pitta , Kapha</i>
Type	Twist, Stretch
Style	<i>Hatha Yoga</i>
Duration	30 To 60 Seconds
Repetition	Do it on the right side first and then on the left
Stretches	Hips, Shoulders, Neck
Strengthens	Spine, Digestive System, Urinary System, Reproductive System

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This Asana must be practiced either first thing in the morning or at least four to six hours after a meal. Your stomach and bowels must be empty when you practice this Asana. The food must be digested so that there is enough energy to expend during the practice.

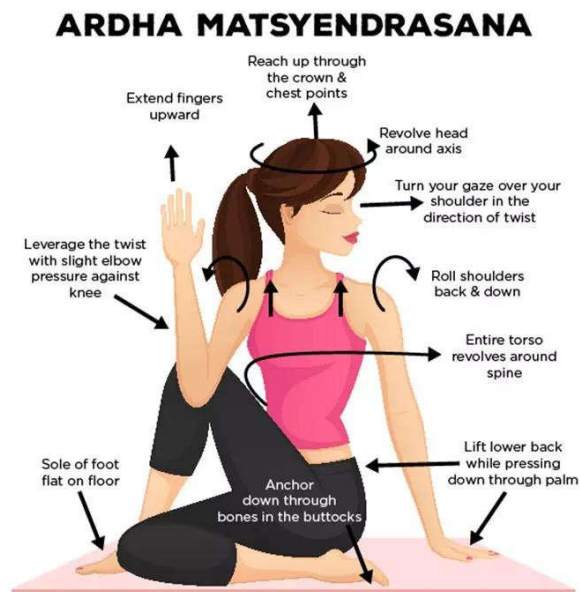


Fig. 1 Positioning of Ardha Matsyendrasana

2. Step of Ardha Matsyendrasana

1. Sit erect with your legs stretched out. Make sure that your feet are placed together and your spine is absolutely erect.
2. Now, bend your left leg such that the heel of the left foot lies next to the right hip. You could also keep the left leg stretched out if you like.
3. Then, place the right leg next to the left knee by taking it over the knee.
4. Twist your waist, neck, and shoulders towards the right, and set your gaze over your right shoulder. Make sure your spine is erect.
5. There are many ways you can place your arms to increase and decrease the stretch. But to do it simply, you can place the right hand behind you, and the left hand on the right knee.
6. Hold the pose for a few seconds, about 30 to 60 as you breathe slowly, yet deeply.
7. Exhale and release the right hand, and then the waist, chest, and finally the neck. Relax as you sit straight.
8. Repeat the steps on the other side, and then exhale and come back to the front.

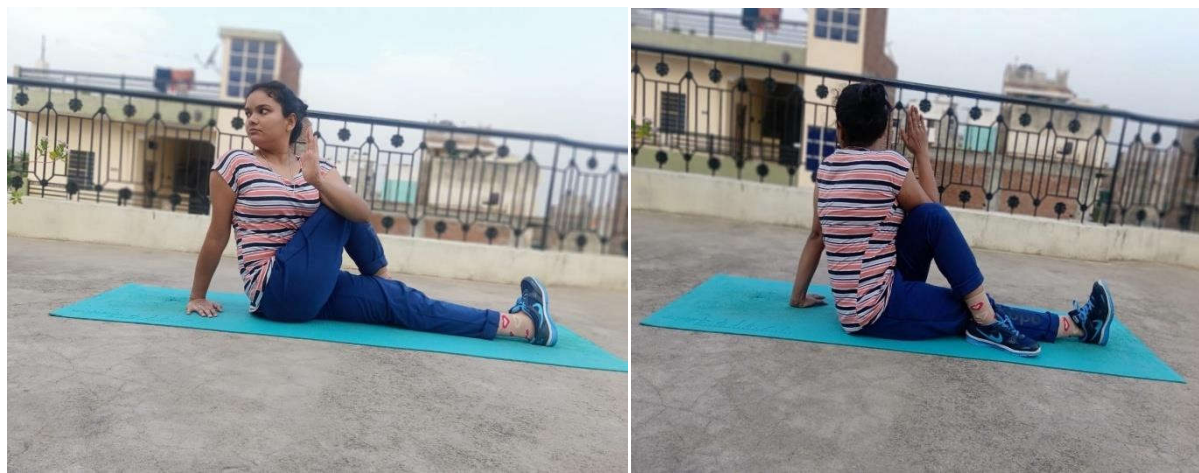


Fig. 2, 3 Ardha Matsyendrasana (side view)



Fig..4, 5 Ardha Matsyendrasana (front view)

3. Benefits of Ardha Matsyendrasana

These are some amazing benefits of the Ardha Matsyendrasana.

1. This Asana makes the spine more flexible. It tones the spinal nerves and improves the way the spinal cord functions.
2. This Asana helps to stretch the muscles on one side of the body while compressing the muscles on the other side.
3. This Asana helps relieve stiffness and back pain from between the vertebrae.
4. This Asana helps to cure a slipped disc.
5. Getting into a twist massages the abdominal organs, therefore increasing the digestive juices and increasing the functioning of the digestive system.
6. This Asana helps to massage and stimulate the pancreas, and thus, helps those suffering from diabetes.
7. This Asana helps to regulate the secretion of both adrenalin and bile.
8. The Asana helps to relieve stress and tension that is trapped in the back.
9. It also helps to open up the chest and increase the supply of oxygen to the lungs.
10. It helps to loosen the joints at the hip and also releases stiffness.
11. It increases the circulation of blood, purifies the blood, and detoxifies the internal organs.
12. This Asana increases the circulation of blood to the pelvic area, thus providing nutrients, blood, and oxygen, and improving the health of the reproductive system as well as the urinary system.
13. This Asana also helps to cure urinary tract infections.
14. This Asana is also beneficial for menstrual disorders.

4. Precautions and Contraindications

1. This Asana must be avoided during pregnancy and menstruation as it entails a strong twist at the abdomen.
2. People who have recently undergone abdominal, heart or brain surgeries, should not practice this Asana.
3. Those with a hernia or peptic ulcers must do this Asana carefully and under the supervision of a certified yoga instructor.
4. People who have a minor slipped disc problem will benefit from this Asana. But they must do it under supervision, and with a doctor's approval. If you have a severe spinal problem or a severe slipped disc problem, it is best to avoid this Asana.

5. Beginner's Tips

The many hand variations in this pose can make it quite hard for beginners to adapt. First of all, make sure you sit on a blanket and practice this pose. Next, before you try the hand and arm variations, just wrap one arm around the raised leg, and hug your thigh to your torso. With practice, you can start trying other variations.

Anatomy-

Ardha Matsyendrasana benefits the following muscles and hence can be included in yoga sequences with the corresponding muscle(s) focus:

- Arms and Shoulders
- Lower Back
- Middle Back
- Hamstrings
- Hips
- Psoas

All parts of the torso can contribute to this twist—both right and left sides of the front and both right and left sides of the back, at different layers of muscle. The spine has the most balanced rotation when in neutral extension. Flexion in the lumbar spine jeopardizes the stability of the lumbar vertebrae and discs, and too much extension tends to lock the thoracic spine into place, inhibiting axial rotation there.

You can fake the twisting action of this pose by over mobilizing the scapulae and allowing them to adduct (the back one) and abduct (the front one) excessively. When this happens you see the appearance of rotation, but not much actual movement in the spine. Because the shoulder girdle has more range of motion in this direction than the thoracic structures have, it is frequently a more intense spinal twist when the arms are placed in a simple, non bound position. If you would like to clarify the action of the spine, enter this pose without using the arms so the maximum safe action is found in the spine. The leverage of the arms can come in last as a deepening action. Overuse of the arms can direct too much force into vulnerable parts of the spine, particularly T11 and T12.

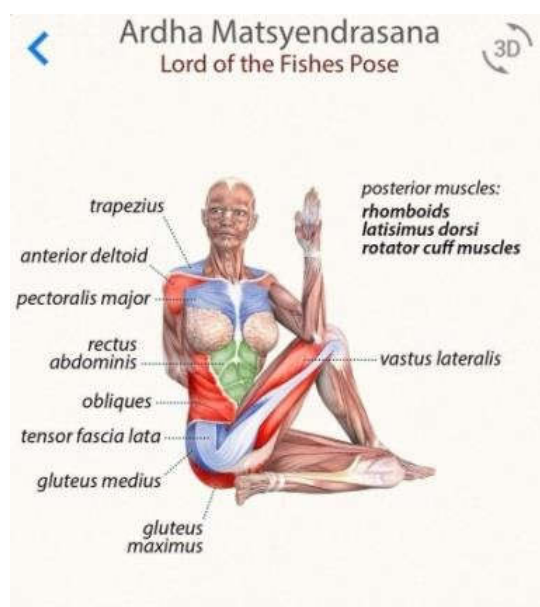


Fig. 6 Ardha Matsyendrasana

Another factor that contributes to the intensity of the spinal twisting action of this pose is the arrangement of the legs, which greatly limits rotational movements in the pelvis—and in fact counter rotates the pelvis away from the rotation of the spine.

6. The science behind the Ardha Matsyendrasana

After a tough, challenging workout, a twist like the Ardha Matsyendrasana can be extremely relaxing. But this pose is also fortifying and has a whole lot of amazing benefits. So don't let yourself get too complacent as you do this asana. Getting into the pose is easy, but the real goodness is in the action of twisting. When you contract your torso muscles and elongate and rotate your spine while deepening your breath, you are greatly benefitted.

Be conscious and work towards gaining the benefits of Ardha Matsyendrasana step by step. This Asana will help you stretch your outer hips and thighs. It also opens up the front of your shoulders and chest as it builds strength along the sides of your body. The twisting will keep your spine healthy as it squeezes and rehydrates the spongy discs that lie between the vertebrae. These tend to get compressed as you age.

Try to avoid slouching and slumping during this Asana – it will limit the degree of spinal rotation that you are capable of. For a deep twist, you must lengthen your spine and make enough space between your vertebrae. Use your breath to deepen the stretches. Inhale and lengthen yourself, and exhale and twist deeper.

If this Asana is practiced with dedication, this deep-seated twist can confront reality and let you know what is really going on in your hips, spine, and even your mind. It lets you take account of a bloated stomach, and also if your breath is constricted or muscles are stiff.

7. Ardha Matsyendrasana yoga sequences

Ardha Matsyendrasana is commonly found in the following types of yoga sequences:

- Teens Yoga sequences
- Hip opening yoga sequences

The practice of Ardha Matsyendrasana can help in the practice of many other yoga poses and can form part of the sequence for these yoga poses. Some of these are mentioned below.

- Pasasana (Noose Pose)
- Parivrtta Upavistha Konasana (Revolved Seated Angle Pose)
- Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose)
- Compass Pose (Surya Yantrasana)
- Bound Revolved Side Angle Pose (Baddha Parivrtta Parsvakonasana)

Ardha Matsyendrasana is considered a base pose as Matsyendrasana variations can be derived from this pose. Matsyendrasana helps boost energy in the body and hence can be included in flow yoga sequences.

8. Advanced Pose Variations

This is an advanced pose you can try to deepen the stretch.

1. If your hips and spine are flexible enough, you can bring the upper left arm to the outside of the upper right thigh.
2. Keeping your legs placed the way they should be, exhale and turn your gaze to the right.
3. Lean away from the upper thigh, and bend the left elbow such that it presses against the outside of the upper right thigh.
4. Now, cuddle your torso against your thigh, and work the upper left arm on the outer leg until the back of the shoulder presses against the knee.
5. Let your elbow stay bent, and hand raised towards the ceiling. Lean in to form a slight upper back bend. Your shoulder blades must be firm against the back. Make sure you lift the front of your torso through the top sternum.

9. Preparatory Poses

- Baddha Konasana
- Janusirsasana
- Virasana
- Bharadvaja's Twist
- Supta Padangusthasana

10. Follow-Up Poses

- Paschimottanasana
- Janusirsasana

Getting your body into a deep twist such as this Asana is not only beneficial but also relaxing. Once you release the twist, you will know what you feel mentally, physically, and emotionally.

11. Modifications and Props

It's often difficult at first to get the torso snug against the inner thigh. Position yourself a foot or so away from a wall, with your back to the wall; the exact distance will depend on the length of your arms. Exhale into the twist and reach back for the wall. Your arm should be almost but not quite extended (make sure you aren't sitting too close to the wall, which will jam the shoulder). Push the wall away and move the front torso against the thigh.

12. Ardha Matsyendrasana Variations

- Poorna Matsyendrasana (Full Spinal Twist Pose)
- Marichyasana B (Sage Twist Pose B)
- Utthita Marichyasana (On Blanket Hand On Knee Extended Sage Marichi Pose On Blanket Hand On Knee)
- Marichyasana Strap (Sage Twist Pose Strap)
- Ardha Matsyendrasana Ii (Half Lord Of The Fishes Pose Ii)
- Chair Seated Twists
- Marichyasana I Prep (Sage Twist I Prep)
- Ardha Matsyendrasana Variation Hand Up (Half Lord Of The Fishes Pose Variation Hand Up)
- Marichyasana A with Strap (Sage Marichi Pose A with Strap)
- Marichyasana Iii (Marichi Pose Iii)

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