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## Sirsasana ~ Headstand

### *1. It's fundamental principles*

Inversions reverse the action of gravity on the body. This can be said to of the effect of inversions on the emotional and energetic levels. Inversions turn everything upside down, allowing us to experience a different perspective.

(class notes, 2004)

### *2. The structural and functional physiology involved*

Sirsasana or Headstand:

- Encourages a greater blood flow to the brain, nourishing cells and the endocrine glands (pituitary – the major regulatory gland and the pineal – which regulates our circadian rhythms)
  - This helps create greater clarity and awareness, and helps rectify any hormonal imbalances
- Can help relieve anxiety and other psychological disorders
- Assists the flow of venous blood and lymphatic drainage from the lower limbs
- Enhances circulation
- Strengthens core muscles and upper body
- Alleviates strain on the spine by inverting gravity's usual pressure
- Can improve structural alignment
- Improves balance
- The weight of the abdominal organs on the diaphragm also encourages deeper exhalation – which aids clearing of the lungs, is beneficial for conditions like asthma, and can (I find) bring about a sense of greater relaxation.

([www.yogajournal.com](http://www.yogajournal.com): Sirsasana, 2004; Class notes 2004, Saraswati, 1996)

### *3. The yogic or subtle physiology involved*

According to Saraswati, inversions encourage an upward flow of energy, from the base chakra to the crown. Sirsasana, due to pressure placed on the crown of the head, helps open and awaken the crown chakra. Practise also assists the opening of sushumna nadi and supports kundalini awakening. Whilst I haven't quite experienced this, I do find that when I practise sirsasana it shifts my mind into a space ready for meditation.

### *4. How it relates to other asanas in the group*

Sirsasana is regarded as the "King" of all asanas (class discussions, 2004) as it inverts the body completely, requires strength, balance, and stimulates the crown chakra. (Saraswati, 1996; class notes/discussion, 2004).

### *5. How it may be sequenced in a practise/class?*

It has been my experience that sirsasana has typically been practised towards the end of a class. I find it's something I like to work up to, and prepare my body for. However some schools to practise it early on in the class for advanced students.

#### Preparatory poses:

Majariasana – to create awareness of broadening through the shoulders and upper back (to avoid collapsing through this area during the inversion)

Vyaghrasana – awareness of core muscles (possibly even work into core strengtheners in urdhva prasarita padasana or practise navasana to strengthen and create awareness of engaging core muscles)

Shoulder rotations to warm and open shoulder joints

Gomukhasana – again to open shoulders, and to create awareness of inward rotation of the upper arm (tricep)

Surya Namaskar – to warm muscles and ligaments in spine

    Bhujangasana – to create awareness of broadening across the chest

    Adho Mukha Svanasana – lengthens through the front and back of the body, creates awareness of equal broadness across chest, shoulders and upper back, gentle inversion

Tadasana – an inverted sirsasana, can create awareness of even distribution of weight

Prasarita Padottanasana C and Uttanasana C – create awareness of inversion, opens through the shoulders, create awareness of lengthening through the neck and back of the shoulders.

Sarsangasana (rabbit) – create awareness of pressure on crown, focus on lengthening the neck here (This can also be an alternative for those students not wanting to go into Sirsasana)

#### Subsequent poses:

Balasana with one fist on top of the other and forehead resting on top – allowing body to rest and re-balance

Tadasana - can be a nice counter pose, and also to lengthen the neck and spine

Savasana – to integrate the effects

## 6. Variations according to needs and major precautions and/or contra-indications

### Pre-cautions/Contra-indications:

- This asana is not recommended for students experiencing any of the following; blood pressure issues, thrombosis, arteriosclerosis, catarrh, chronic constipation, kidney issues, impure blood, weak eye blood vessels, glaucoma, conjunctivitis, ear inflammation, headache, migraine or any form of blood haemorrhage.
- It's not recommended for pregnant students (unless it has been a part of their practise before their pregnancy and they feel they have the strength to continue, but perhaps not stay in the pose for as long), and for women who are menstruating, again only holding the pose (if they feel comfortable to) for a few breaths.

([www.yogajournal.com](http://www.yogajournal.com):Sirsasana, 2004; Saraswati, 1996; class notes & discussions, 2004)

## 7. Main indications for adjustment.

- When students are first learning sirasana, it can be a useful practise to set them up against a wall for support, and this may also help with any fears that may be present.
- Stacking two blocks in a 'T' formation can be a very powerful way of creating that awareness of the opening needed through the upper back and the shoulders, and of maintaining the length in the neck. Slowly, as the students become more comfortable, they can begin walking their feet up towards their body, gradually increasing the pressure on the crown of the head.  
Once the student feels comfortable, and there is sufficient opening and strength present, they can begin lifting their feet off the floor, and even upright (see diagram on front page). At this point the wall can be a useful support, until the alignment, core and upper body strength is present for a freestanding sirasana.
- Again, until the comfort and strength comes it may be useful for the student to stay in sirasana for only a few breaths. (As soon as the shoulders begin to collapse and the neck starts to lose it's length the student must come out of the pose)

## References

CAE Class notes/discussions, teacher's instructions, own experience. etc. 2004

Saraswati, S.S. (1996). *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. Yoga Publications Trust. Bihar, India.

*Sirsasana*. [www.yogajournal.com/poses/.....](http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/.....) 31/01/2005.