

SITTING POSTURES

Easy Sitting Pose | Sukhasana

Sukhasana is a very common posture, but many people find it very difficult to sit on the ground with cross legs. So, as a teacher, you will often have to correct or modify it. It is very important that when someone is sitting, they must have their lumbar curve. If they're not sitting properly, they will lose this curve.

Common Issues

One of the most common mistakes made by new practitioners is they try sitting directly on the ground. For most people attempting to sit in such a position can lead to back and knee pain and even chronic issues.

Two anatomical issues lay at hand here:

- Position of the pelvis

For the spine to be erect, and the lumbar curve to be proper, the pelvis must be in a so-called anterior tilt. When this is the case, you will be sitting on what is commonly referred to as your sit bones (Ischial tuberosity). Now, your spine has a proper foundation to be in its natural double-s curve, expanded and held by the inter-balance between your abdominal and back muscles. If these muscles are activated from a proper foundation, there is no unnecessary strain on your back.

How do you know if your students are sitting correctly? Look at the position of their knees in relation to their pelvis. If the knees are higher than the pelvis, they will be sitting on their tailbone and straining their back. Their knees should be ideally below the pelvis, in some cases of very good external rotation at the hip joint, having the knees at the same level as the pelvis is acceptable too.

The best technique is to sit on a cushion or block to raise the pelvis higher than the knees, allowing it to indeed create the anterior tilt as explained above.

Even if the student is sitting on the cushion, they might still slouch and lose their proper lumbar curve.

To assist the student, stand behind the student with the side of your ankle placed against the bottom of the student's spine. Use blade hands against the front of their shoulders and stabilize the shoulders while lifting your ankle and guiding their pelvis into a forward tilt.

- Position of the knees

Making sure that the pelvis is higher than the knees, already eliminates a great deal of stress on the back and the knee joint. In order to really find the ideal position, however, the knees should be resting on the floor or on a support.

When sitting in a cross-leg position on top of a meditation cushion, by just shifting your weight forward to the edge of the cushion, and by widening the distance between the knees, most people will be able to rest the knees on the ground. This is important as if the knees are 'dangling' without support, first of all, you might start to feel the tension in the knee joint and secondly, you might start to tilt backward onto your tailbone after a while. Grounding the knees helps to keep the integrity of the pelvis and protects your knee joints.

If the knees aren't resting on the mat, you can simply provide some blanket under the knees for support.

Diamond Pose | Vajrasana

Vajrasana, Diamond Pose, is a great alternative for Sukhasana because in this pose, you will always sit on your sitting bones and you get your lumbar curve. In Vajrasana we sit on the knees, with the buttocks resting on the heels.

Common Issues

- Hunch in the middle and upper back

Sometimes people may be hunching in Diamond Pose. This commonly happens when the student does not sit actively. To correct the hunch in the middle and upper back, we sit down on one knee and place outside of our other quadriceps horizontally along the student's middle back. Cup your hands around the shoulders of the student and stabilize the shoulders. Then, using your quadriceps, gently lift and straighten the middle back.

- Pain in the knees

Sometimes people don't find Diamond Pose comfortable because of tight knees. In this case, ask the student to place a cushion in between the heels and sit on it. For longer durations of Diamond Pose (for example during meditation), it is recommended for everyone to use a cushion. For people with tight knees or any knee issues, you can simply increase the support (maybe two cushions instead of one), this will take a lot of pressure away from their knees.