

# twist to fly

*Have fun as you prepare for a challenging arm balance.*



By all appearances, Parsva Bakasana (Side Crane Pose) seems to require serious upper-body strength. But Prana Flow Yoga teacher Simon Park says that brute strength isn't the key. Instead, mastering the physics of the pose will help you unlock Side Crane. You need enough twist to place your elbow on the outside of the opposite leg and get both arms on the floor in the shape of Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose).

Here, Park shares a thorough twisting practice that will lead you into this challenging arm balance. Approach it with a childlike sense of wonder and playfulness instead of focusing on the physical achievement. After all, the therapeutic **benefits of twists** themselves are powerful. In Parsva Bakasana, sensation and movement are created in the lower spine and deep soft-tissue structures (including the digestive and reproductive systems) of that region. Many of the body's major organs and the nerves that manage these significant structures are located here. The twisting and strengthening action of the pose increases the digestive fire and keeps the reproductive system healthy.

Before you begin, Park suggests you keep these tips in mind. First, since twists require that you compress the abdomen, try to practice them on a relatively empty stomach. Second, keep your hips even in all the poses to avoid tweaking your lower back. Third, don't force your breath in twists; instead, relax and allow the breath to find its way into your body. If the last few poses are out of your reach, enjoy poses 1 through 4 for a while. After some practice, the final poses will present themselves to you on a silver platter, Park says. DIANE ANDERSON

## to finish

**Cool Down** Stabilize your nervous system and your back with a long-held Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend) with the hands on the floor. A finishing sequence of Paschimottanasana (Seated Forward Bend), Halasana (Plow Pose), and Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand) or Viparita Karani (Legs-up-the-Wall Pose) will guide you quietly toward Savasana (Corpse Pose).

## to begin

**Warm Up** Practice a combination of Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutations) A and B, or try variations that include shoulder openings and twists. Another great prep pose is Jathara Parivartanasana (Revolved Abdomen Pose). With the same twisting action as Parsva Bakasana, it warms up the core and loosens the back.

PHOTOS: RORY EARNSHAW; MODEL: STACIE OVERBY; STYLIST: LYN HEINEKEN; HAIR/MAKEUP: IVAN MENDOZA/WORKGROUP; TOP: LULULEMON ATHLETICA; BOTTOMS: LUCY

### 1 Utkatasana Twist (Chair Pose), variation

Begin in Tadasana (Mountain Pose) with your feet together and your hands at your heart in Anjali Mudra (Salutation Seal). Center yourself. Exhale and bend your knees. Bring your hands down, palms facing back. Inhale and raise your arms skyward, palms facing each other alongside your head. Extend your spine and lengthen from your hips to your fingertips. Exhale as you slowly sweep both arms to the outside of the right knee. Place your left elbow outside your right knee and reach your right arm skyward to the Utkatasana Twist. Stay for 3 to 5 breaths. Inhale back to Utkatasana. Repeat on both sides up to 3 times.

### 2 Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)

Exhale as you touch the floor and straighten your legs, folding into Uttanasana. Release your head and exhale. Inhale and extend your torso forward into Ardha Uttanasana (Half Standing Forward Bend), fingertips on the floor or shins. Exhale and fold again into Uttanasana. Explore the rebound effect of energy running up and down your legs. Enjoy this inversion for 5 to 8 breaths.

### 3 Parsvottanasana (Intense Side Stretch)

Step into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose). Enjoy a vinyasa of Plank Pose, Chaturanga Dandasana, and Urdhva Mukha Svanasana (Upward-Facing Dog Pose). From Down Dog, step your right foot between your hands and slide your left foot forward about a foot, angling it out about 45 degrees. Straighten your right leg and pull your outer right hip back toward the centerline. Spin your left thigh slightly forward to square your hips. Press your fingertips into the floor to extend your spine forward, then fold your torso over your right leg. Walk your hands toward the back foot to stretch your upper back and let your shoulders and neck release. Enjoy for 5 to 8 breaths.

### 4 Parivrtta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)

From Parsvottanasana, inhale to standing. With your right leg forward, stretch your left arm up to extend the entire left side of the body. Reach your left arm forward, and place the left hand outside of the right foot. Rotate and twist



toward the right and up, reaching the right arm skyward. Adjust your feet so that your hips are comfortably square. Feel the extension and spiral action of the spine through the crown of the head. Lift and open your heart to the sky for 5 to 8 breaths. Then simply release your torso forward into Parsvottanasana. In this variation, both arms reach forward on either side of the foot, and your fingertips or palms touch the floor.

### 5 Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana (Revolved Half Moon Pose)

Bend your right leg and use the ball of your back foot to propel yourself forward and stand on your right leg. Lift your left leg, internally rotate it, and level your hips. Place your fingertips on the floor and extend your heart forward. Move your left hand or fingertips onto a block about a foot in front of the outer edge of your right foot. Rotate and spiral the trunk away from the hips, opening your chest and extending your right arm. Keep your hips level and your back leg extending for 5 to 8 breaths. Then, lower your left foot softly to the earth and bend your right knee into a lunge. Step your right foot back to Down Dog, and move through a vinyasa. Repeat poses 3, 4, and 5 on the left side.

### 6 Parivrtta Parsvakonasana (Revolved Side Angle Pose)

Stand in a lunge, with your right leg forward. Stretch the entire left side of your body as you extend your left arm up. Bring the left side of your body over toward the right and hook your left elbow deep outside your right knee. Place your left fingertips on the floor for balance, then extend your right arm alongside the ear. Slowly rotate your torso skyward to the right while anchoring the pose





by straightening the back leg. Remain for 5 to 8 breaths. In this twist and the following poses, soften your abdomen to allow for smooth breathing.

### 7 Pasasana (Noose Pose), variation

From Tadasana with your feet together, bend your knees into a deep squat, keep your knees and feet together, and place your fingertips on the floor for balance. Your hips are below your knees, and your sitting bones are close to your heels. Twist your torso to the right and hook your left elbow behind and outside the right knee. Extend your left hand to the floor. Now raise your right arm skyward, expanding the chest and twisting the trunk. Stay for 5 to 8 breaths. To keep the hips level, slowly press your right hip crease forward. Repeat on the other side.

### 8 Parsva Bakasana (Side Crane Pose)

From a deep squat, with feet and knees together, turn your torso to the right and hook your left elbow to the outside of your right knee. Place both palms on the floor outside the right thigh. Create Chaturanga Dandasana arms. Shift your weight into your hands until your feet float off the floor. Press into your hands and lift your hips up. Keep your knees bent or straighten the legs together. Beginners may rest the right hip on the right elbow, but eventually there will be no need to rest the hip on the arm. The chest moves forward away from the hips. Enjoy for as long as you can keep the balance. Repeat on the left side.



A video of this Home Practice sequence can be found online at [yogajournal.com/livemag](http://yogajournal.com/livemag).