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## Seated Asana for Concentration / Meditation

As we prepare for a formal meditation practice (dharana and dhyana), we begin by selecting a posture that allows the optimal flow of energy (prana).

The posture should be comfortable and one where you can maintain a balanced and vertical spine while being free from distractions from your body.

All of the following seated postures are appropriate and valid postures for meditation – what's most important is that you choose the posture that is most suitable for your body.

### Sutra 2.46 Sthira Sukhamasanam

“Asana must have the dual qualities of alertness and relaxation” TKV Desikachar

Which posture helps you to best maintain that balance of effort (sthira) and sukham (ease or 'good space')?

Meditation is generally practiced seated – this helps to stop us from dozing off! But if the seated postures are painful for you then choose to lie down instead, setting an intention to stay alert and focussed throughout your practice so that you are less likely to fall asleep. It may also help to lie in semi-supine, with the legs bent and soles of the feet to the mat – this will help to keep you more alert and will also reduce pressure on the lower back.

### Seated in a chair

This is a perfect way to take mini meditation breaks during your workday, or as an option in class or at home if you find sitting on the floor uncomfortable.



Image credit: Yoga Journal

- Choose a suitable, supportive chair with a straight back, a dining chair is great - a comfy squishy armchair is less ideal. (But..... please don't let having the perfect chair be an obstacle to your practice! If the only chair available is a squishy armchair or the seat on the bus then close your eyes and focus on your breath – a few minutes here is better than none!).
- Sit towards the centre or the front edge of the chair.
- Rest the feet flat on the floor. Ideally the knees should be aligned with the hips/pelvis; if your legs are short then pop a yoga block or bricks underneath the feet, and if your legs are long you may need some extra padding on the chair seat.
- Be aware of your foundations - soles of the feet and sitting bones.
- Feel spacious through the spine – maintaining your natural curves and keeping the head aligned.

To help with the alignment of the spine you can also use a folded blanket to help with the tilt of the pelvis (see the photo above) – this may help to reduce rounding of the spine.

## Sukhasana (Easy Pose)

Sukha = easy (remember where you've seen the word 'Sukha' before?)

Sitting in a crossed legged position may be easy for some, yet this is a challenging posture for many, requiring strong core and back muscles as well as flexibility of the hips (allowing for external rotation of the thighs at the hip sockets).



Image credit: Yoga Mind, Body & Soul

This external rotation at the hip joint may be limited not only by tight muscles but by our bony structure – both the depth and angle of the hip socket will have an impact on our ability to move into the posture. Where there are either soft or bony limitations you may find that the knees are higher than the hips and there may be pressure or sensation felt in the knee joint.

If the spine and shoulders are rounded this places pressure on the muscles of the back and restricts the free movement of the diaphragm and our ability to breath fully.

So, attention to your alignment and wise use of props can help you to feel more freedom and ease in Sukhasana.

- Begin in dandasana (staff pose) with even weight through both sitting bones and length through the entire spine.
- Bend your knees, crossing the legs at the shins
- Keep your pelvis in a neutral position, without leaning forwards or back.
- Lengthen through the natural curves of your spine – keeping the back erect but relaxed.
- Feel spaciousness in the upper body all the way from the tailbone up to the crown of the head.
- Check if the shoulders are rounding and the chest 'caving in' – if so, imagine a torch light at your heart centre and shine the light forwards (rather than down into your lap).
- Hands can rest in your lap with the palms up, one resting on top of the other, or on the knees in chin or jnana mudra.
- The next time that you practice, swap the cross of the legs so that you create balance throughout the two sides of the body.



### Tips for bringing more ease into Sukhasana:

- Use the support of a wall behind you
- Use a block, folded blankets, meditation cushion or bolster – this will help to tilt the pelvis, release the hips and bring the thighbone/knees in line with the hips
- Use a brick under each knee
- Place a rolled-up blanket on top of the feet and under the shins, and curled under the knees



This is a wonderful propped version from Roger Cole at Yoga international

## Siddhasana (Accomplished Pose or Adept's Pose)



Image credit: Yoga Mind, Body & Soul

Said to “purify the 72,000 nadis” (Hatha Yoga Pradipika) by stimulating the muladhara / root chakra, allowing for the flow of prana along the spine and stimulating the meridians in the feet.

In this asana the feet are closer to the groin and the uppermost foot rests on the calf and ankle of the other leg.

This requires great openness in the hips and ankles, but some may find this more comfortable than Sukhasana.

- Begin in Dandasana – noticing your alignment and using any props as you did with sukhasana.
- Bend the right leg, bringing the right heel to rest in towards the groin
- Bend the left leg, with the left heel resting in front of the right ankle. Both feet will be resting on the floor.
- Alternatively, you may be able to rest the left foot in between the right calf muscle and thigh (see the image above of Donna Farhi in this version).

## Vajrasana (Thunderbolt Pose) and Virasana (Hero Pose)



**Vajrasana: sitting on the heels**



**Virasana: sitting between the feet**

These two postures are wonderful alternatives if sukhasana and siddhasana aren't comfortable for you. As well as being useful postures for meditation, they are also said to aid digestion.

They bring a deep stretch into the thighs and front of the ankles, however the deep flexion of the knees can be uncomfortable for some people. While the 'normal' range of flexion for the knees is up to 130 – 140 degrees, sitting on the heels in vajrasana requires around 150

degrees of flexion and sitting between the feet in virasana requires even more, around 170 degrees.

These asana also require internal rotation of the hip joint – for some people this will feel wonderful and more natural than the external rotation required in sukhasana/ siddhasana and much of this depends on the natural structure of your hip joints. Think of how you used to sit on the floor as a child – did you naturally sit with crossed legs or on/between your feet?

### **Vajrasana: sitting on the heels**

- Begin in high kneeling
- Bring the knees together, and sit back on the heels
- Point the feet in line with the ankles
- Some variations have one foot resting on top of the other (be sure that you don't end up leaning to one side)
- Find the most comfortable position for your spine
- Place your hands on your thighs in chin or jnana mudra

### **Virasana: sitting between the feet**

This posture requires a little more internal rotation of the hips to allow the body to lower down between the feet.

- Begin in high kneeling
- Bring the knees together, slide your feet apart and lower down between the feet.
- Find the most comfortable position for your spine
- Place your hands on your lap in chin or jnana mudra

As you lower down into virasana, you may find it helpful to use your hands to roll the fleshy part of the calf muscles out to the side – creating a little more space in the posture.

### **Tips for bringing more ease into Vajrasana & Virasana**

- Place a soft blanket beneath the feet if the bones of the ankles feel uncomfortable against the mat
- If the sitting bones don't easily reach the floor then use stacked blocks or a bolster
- Use a meditation stool
- Place a rolled blanket underneath the ankles

Or practice in a chair. Check out this great version with a chair and bolster – a lovely lifted spine and less pressure on the knees:



Image credit: [YogaUOnline](https://www.yogaUOnline.com)

**Cautions and contraindications:**

- Heart problems
- Knee pain or conditions affecting the knees
- Hip pain or conditions affecting the hips
- Lower back pain
- Ankle / foot injuries

**Practice and patience are key...**

A regular yoga asana practice helps to prepare your body for all of these seated postures, so that gradually you can sit for extended periods of time and experience the stillness of deep meditation. Over time you may experience greater ease in the postures, while remembering that it is a truly experienced student of yoga that listens to their body and makes wise use of props.

Always remember ahimsa (non-harm) and never force your body somewhere it's not ready to go.

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