

# Shîrshâsana (Headstand)

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The contents of this bibliography do not provide medical advice and should not be so interpreted. Before beginning any exercise program, see your physician for clearance.

**Ananthanarayanan, T. V. Raghu.** The biomechanics of sirsasana. *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram Darsanam*, Feb 1994, pp. 15-16.

**Autonomic changes during the practice of headstand (sirsasana).** Bangalore, India: Vivekananda Kendra Yoga Prakashana, 1996-1997.

**Bena, E., and J. Formanek.** The influence of the headstand on EEG, pulse frequency and blood pressure. Proceedings Physical Fitness Satellite Symposium, 25<sup>th</sup> Conference on Physiological Science, Prague, 1971.

**Chandra, F. J.** Medical and physiological aspects of headstand. *The Journal of The International Association of Yoga Therapists*, 1990, 1(I&II):29-34. Reprinted as a booklet by Cambridge Yoga Publications, Cambridge, England.

**Cole, Roger.** Intuitive alignment: Sirsasana. *My Yoga Mentor*, Aug 2004, no. 9. Article available online: [http://www.yogajournal.com/teacher/1290\\_1.cfm](http://www.yogajournal.com/teacher/1290_1.cfm).

“Students who master alignment in Mountain Pose may have trouble maintaining it in Headstand when their world turns upside down. Here are some specific exercises to help your students attain verticality by sensing their alignment from the inside out.”

**Desikachar, T. K. V.** Sirsasana as a virparita karani mudra. *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram Darsanam*, Feb 1994, pp. 7-10.

**The editors of Yoga Journal.** Answer the question: “My question has to do with headstand: When I’m moving out of it, my sacroiliac joints roar with pain. Can you explain this, and perhaps offer a solution?” *Yoga Journal*, May/Jun 2000, p. 58.

**Ezraty, Maty, with Melanie Lora.** Block steady: Building to headstand. *Yoga Journal*, Jun 2005, pp. 63-70.

“A strong upper body equals a stronger Headstand. Use a block and this creative sequence of poses to build strength and stability for your inversions.”

**Feuerstein, Georg.** Viparita-karani-mudra: A Clarification. *Yoga Quarterly Review*, no. 3, pp. 7-17.

\_\_\_\_\_. The inverted pose (*vîparîta-karanî-mudra*) according to the Sanskrit texts. *The Yoga Review*, Summer 1982, 2(2):79-87.

Abstract: The headstand referred to as sirsa-asana in contemporary yoga literature is indeed not an asana at all. Various classical yoga texts classify the head posture among the mudras giving it a special place. The headstand has a pronounced effect on the glands and generates a much higher rate of bio-energy and deeper changes in the human personality than asanas.

**Freeman, Richard.** Threads of Universal Form in Back Bending and Finishing Poses workshop. 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Yoga Journal Convention, 27-30 Sep 2001, Estes Park, Colorado.

“Small, subtle adjustments in form and attitude can make problematic and difficult poses produce their fruits. We will look a little deeper into back bends, shoulderstands, headstands, and related poses. Common difficulties, injuries, and misalignments and their solutions [will be] explored.”

**Gaertner, H., L. Gaertner, W. Goszcz, and T. Pasek.** [Influence of sirsasana—head stand posture—of thirty minutes duration on blood composition and circulation.] Paper given at 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Haematological Society, Stockholm, 30 Aug – 4 Sep 1964. Also in *Acta Physiol Pol*, 1965, 16(1):44. [In Polish.]

Measured the effects of one-half hour of *sirsasana*, including blood chemicals, heartbeat, blood pressure, and respiration.

**Gilmore, Ruth.** Answers the question: “I am a Yoga teacher and have a pupil who is afraid to do inversions because she had laser surgery to her eyes a few years ago. She feels pressure on the eyeballs when she is inverted. I used headstand stools for those who cannot do Sirsasana alone and wondered if this gives a stronger ‘rush’ to the head than putting one’s head on the mat where there is a certain amount of counter-pressure. The lady concerned is a dedicated student who would like to perform inverted asanas and seems comfortable doing Adhomukha Svanasana. Is there any danger to the eyes if one inverts after laser or cataract surgery?” *Yoga & Health*, Oct 2003, p. 37.

**Gudmestad, Julie.** Save your neck: Practiced with careful alignment, yoga poses can help alleviate past neck problems and prevent future ones. *Yoga Journal*, Jul/Aug 2001, pp. 115-118. Article available online: [http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/529\\_1.cfm](http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/529_1.cfm).

This article provides advice on proper alignment in headstand and on preparing properly for doing headstand by first mastering various other poses.

\_\_\_\_\_. Spread your wings: With inversions, the position and stabilization of the scapulae set the stage for the alignment and life of your entire pose. *Yoga Journal*, Dec 2002, pp. 145-147. Article available online: [http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/792\\_1.cfm](http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/792_1.cfm).

\_\_\_\_\_. The learning curve: Maintaining a proper cervical curve by strengthening weak muscles can ease many common pains in the neck. *Yoga Journal*, Nov 2003. Article available online: [http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/1058\\_1.cfm](http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/1058_1.cfm).

“To check your habitual neck alignment when you’re doing yoga, sit or stand up tall, lifting your chest, and then check with your hand to see if you have a nice soft curve in your neck. Your chin and gaze should be level. You will notice that if you drop your chin, you look down at the floor. With a normal neck curve, you look straight ahead; if

you were at the beach, you'd be looking at the line between the water and the sky.

”This is the neutral neck alignment you want to take into most of your yoga poses. It’s especially important that you re-create this Tadasana alignment in Sirsasana (Headstand), a pose in which you bear the weight of your body on your neck. If you have a proper cervical curve in Sirsasana, you’ll be looking straight ahead. If your neck is too flat, your weight will shift toward the back of your head and your gaze will be high up on the wall in front of you. This position is quite stressful for the ligaments, muscles, and disks in your neck, and can lead to injury. Because of this danger, it’s a good idea to have an experienced teacher occasionally check your alignment in Headstand.”

**Gustavson, Jean.** Eyelid spots. *Spectrum: The Journal of the British Wheel of Yoga*, Autumn 1997, p. 21.

Jean Gustavson responds to a letter to the editor by Sally-Ann Webb in the Autumn 1997 issue inquiring about what could cause the formation of “little red spots on the eyelids after practicing the headstand or handstand.” Jean writes that they are “petechiae, small haemorrhages caused by an increased postural hydrostatic pressure on the head.” She says that as a nurse she has “seen the whole face covered in petechiae after childbirth due, again, to increased pressure.” She indicates that she knows of no preventative measure other than limiting the time spent in the *asana*. She does not know if age would be a factor and tends to discount blood pressure, as hers is low and she has experienced petechiae, although she says it could possibly be a contributory cause in some cases.

**Headstand.** *Bindu*, no. 3.

**The Headstand, Shoulderstand & Upper Body Strength.** *Yoga International* Reprint Series. Honesdale, Pa.: The Himalayan International Institute Press, [www.himalayaninstitute.org](http://www.himalayaninstitute.org).

“Master the headstand in five stages, learn postures that help build upper body strength, and understand the subtle power of the shoulderstand, plus the poses that balance and prepare you to receive the full benefits of this posture.”

**Heaney, Antoinette.** The headstand (sirsasana). *Yoga Today*, Nov 1980, 5(7):39-41.

**Hutchinson, Ronald.** The king of the asanas. In Ronald Hutchinson, *Yoga: A Way of Life*. London: Hamlyn, 1974, pp. 87-92.

**Iyengar Forum.** Bloodshot eyes in headstand. Available online: <http://www.iyengar-yoga.com/forum/35.html>.

**Kilmurray, Arthur.** Sirsasana—headstand. *Yoga Journal*, Jul/Aug 1990.

**Krishnamacharya, T.** Sirsasana—a photo feature. *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram Darsanam*, Feb 1994, pp. 19-21.

**Kuvalayananda, Swami.** Blood pressure experiments on sirsasana. *Yoga Mimamsa*, 1926, 2(2):92-112.

**Lasater, Judith.** Sirsasana: Headstand. *Yoga Journal*, May/June 1991.

**Macy, Dayna.** Head over heels: Pride takes a back seat when learning handstand. *Yoga Journal*, Nov/Dec 1999, p. 160.

**Manjunath, N. K., and Shirley Telles.** Effects of sirsasana (headstand) practice on autonomic and respiratory variables. *Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology*, Jan 2003, 47(1).

Abstract:

The present study had two aims: (1) To assess heart rate variability (HRV) along with non-specific autonomic measures (used in earlier studies), before and after two minutes of the headstand. (2) To compare changes in two categories of subjects, i.e., those who practiced the headstand in a traditional way (without any support) and those who used the support of the wall (a present day adaptation). The subjects were forty male volunteers (age range 19 to 36 years), with twenty subjects under each category. The following changes were significant after the practice, compared to values at baseline. (i) Both categories had an increase in the power of the low frequency component (LF) and a decrease in the high frequency component (HF) of the HRV spectrum, increased LF/HF ratio, and decreased heart rate. (ii) Subjects who practiced the headstand with the support of a wall showed reduced finger plethysmogram amplitude suggesting increased sympathetic vasomotor tone. (iii) Practicing the headstand without support was associated with an increase in the skin conductance level, suggestive of increased sympathetic sudomotor tone. Hence, both categories showed similar changes in the HRV components though changes in sympathetic vasomotor and sudomotor activity were different. These changes suggest sympathetic activation, irrespective of the method of practice.

**Mehta, Arti H.** *Sîrsâsana*. *Yoga Rahasya*, 2003, 10(1):91-99.

**Palkhivala, Aadil.** A beginner's guide to yoga's key inversions. *Yoga Journal*, Jan/Feb 2004, pp. 74-81, 134-137.

**Pattanaik, Devdutt.** No headstands at the Yoga Institute. *Yoga and Total Health*, Dec 1999, pp. 16-17.

On serving the over enthusiastic out-of-shape student who thinks Yoga is about doing headstands, when it is actually about attaining a state of equanimity.

**Pedersen, Benny.** I stand on my head for my health. *Bindu*, 2000, no. 13, p. 5. (On 92-year-old Chris Sylvest.)

**Ramamurthi, B.** A neurosurgeon on sirsasana: An interview with Dr. B. Ramanurthi. *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram Darsanam*, Feb 1994, pp. 17-18.

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**Rosen, Richard.** Taking the danger out of the headstand. *Yoga World*, Apr-Jun 1999, no. 9, pp. 3-4.

**Schatz, Mary Pullig, M.D.** A woman's balance: Inversions and menstruation. [http://www.iyengar.ch/Deutsch/text\\_menstruation.htm](http://www.iyengar.ch/Deutsch/text_menstruation.htm) or <http://www.yoga.com/raw/yoga/info/InversionsAndMenstruation.html>.

**Salamba Sirsasana (Supported Headstand).** *Yoga Journal*. Article available online: [http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/481\\_1.cfm](http://www.yogajournal.com/poses/481_1.cfm).

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“The quickest way to transform your world is to turn yourself upside down. Any serious yoga practice will do that metaphorically, but actually performing headstand and shoulder stand is a great way to begin the journey.”

**Smoots, Elizabeth, M.D.** Can I do headstands during my period? WebMD, 13 Nov 2000. Available online: <http://my.webmd.com/content/article/1676.51913>.

**Thomas, Andrew.** Yoga and cardiovascular function. *The Journal of The International Association of Yoga Therapists*, 1993, no. 4, pp. 39-41. (Discusses the effect on the heart of *shirshasana*.)

**Thompson, Ken.** The headstand and after. *Yoga Today*, Mar 1983, 7(11):4-11.

**Udupa, K. N., R. H. Singh, and R. M. Shettiwar.** A comparative study of the effect of some individual yogic practices in normal persons. *Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 1975, 63(8):1066-1071.

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### ***Of Related Interest***

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