

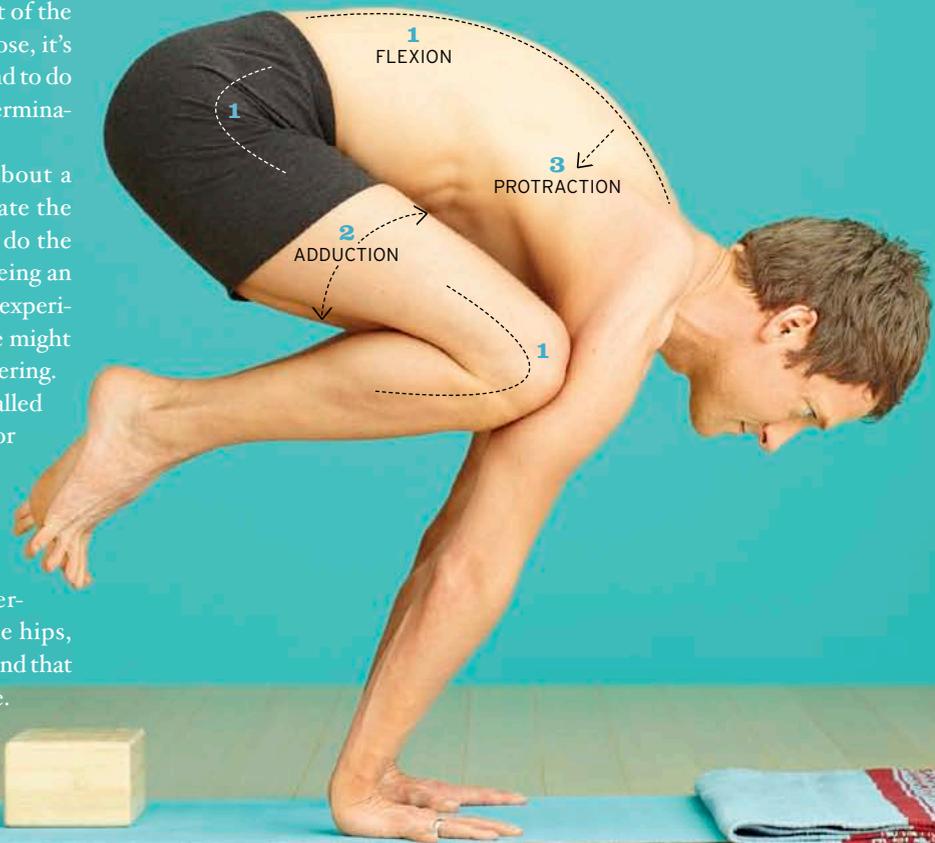
winged migration

When attempting a challenging yoga pose, you might notice that you work harder than you do in other poses. When a pose is inaccessible, your mind tries to identify the problem—your core isn't strong enough, your back isn't flexible enough—and then strives to remedy it. To be fair, sometimes a little extra effort is necessary. But effort is only part of the equation. To master a complex pose, it's essential to learn its mechanics, and to do this, you need to temper your determination with a sense of curiosity.

When you become curious about a pose, you will more easily cultivate the awareness and skills you need to do the pose. And when the pose stops being an obstacle to conquer, your internal experience might change, too. The pose might become more soothing or empowering.

Bakasana (Crane Pose, often called Crow Pose) is an excellent pose for testing this theory. It requires perseverance and strength, but it also requires a nuanced understanding of what you're asking your body to do. Once you understand the required actions of the hips, spine, and shoulder blades, you'll find that the pose becomes more accessible.

Fly into Bakasana by stopping along your journey and learning the required actions.



action plan

1 The dominant action in Bakasana is flexion. (You flex your joints when you bring them closer together.) You can see this when you look at the pose: The spine rounds, the knees bend, and the hips flex so that the legs can fold in toward the abdomen.

2 The second action in Bakasana is adduction—you adduct, or you squeeze, the legs toward the midline of the body.

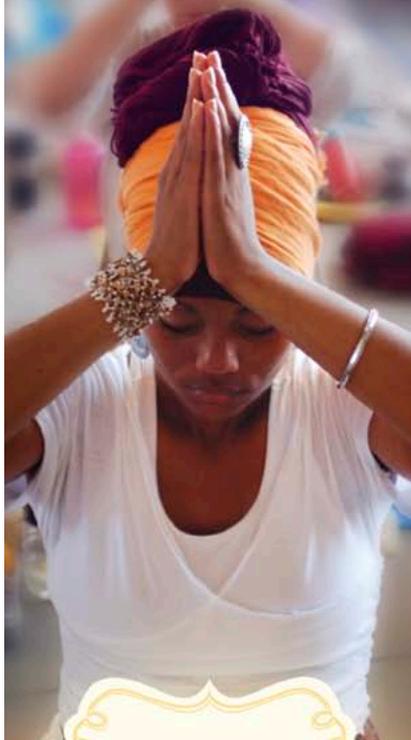
3 The third action is shoulder protraction: The inner borders of the shoulder blades move away from the spine, while the bottom tips move down and into the back.

the end game

By practicing three of the primary actions of Bakasana in more accessible propped postures, you'll imprint the feeling of the actions so that you can eventually reproduce them in the full pose, without the props.

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align + refine

warm-up

This sequence requires a combination of strength and flexibility in your spine, shoulders, inner legs, and abdominals. Before you begin, prepare with postures that open your inner legs and facilitate hip flexion, such as Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose), Virabhadrasana II (Warrior Pose II), and Utthita Parsvakona-

sana (Extended Side Angle Pose). Stretch the muscles between your shoulder blades with Garudasana (Eagle Pose), and warm up your spine and back muscles with Cat-Cow Pose. Finally, warm up your abdominals in Plank Pose, Paripurna Navasana (Full Boat Pose), and Ardha Navasana (Half Boat).

malasana | *garland pose* on chair



propping Sit on the front edge of a chair with both feet planted firmly on the floor.

why this works To safely flex your spine in Crane Pose, you need to tilt the pelvis forward. Sitting on a chair, rather than on the floor, requires less flexibility, making it easier to achieve the tilt.

how to Sit on the front edge of a chair and place your feet on the floor slightly wider than your hips. Turn your feet and legs out about 45 degrees. Inhale slowly and deeply. Fold forward between your inner legs and place your hands on the floor while you exhale. If you are sitting on a folding chair that has rungs between the legs, reach underneath the chair and hold the rungs. If you can't reach the rungs, wrap a belt around the

center rung and hold on to each end of the belt with your hands. If your chair doesn't have rungs, simply place your hands on the floor between your inner ankles.

Observe the stretch in your inner legs, groins, and spine. Continue to breathe steadily as you intensify the actions of your arms. If you are holding the rungs or the belt, pull against the surface you are holding and bend your elbows out to the sides. (If your hands are on the floor, bend your elbows out to the sides and press them against the inside of your legs.) After 5 slow, deep breaths, place your hands on your hips, press your feet into the floor, and slowly bring your torso back up until you are sitting vertically.

marichyasana I on bolster



propping Sit on a bolster, with a strap between your hands

why this works This continues to warm up the back body while emphasizing deep flexion of the hips and knees. Placing one heel on the bolster further facilitates the forward fold and gives you better leverage for binding your arms around your body.

how to Place the bolster across your sitting bones and place your sitting bones on the front edge. Straighten your left leg. Bend your right knee and place your right heel on the front of the bolster in front of your right sitting bone. Make sure that you have at least 6 inches of space between the inside of your right foot and your left leg.

Clasp both hands around your front knee and lengthen your spine. Now, inhale

and reach your right arm toward the ceiling. Exhale, and reach your arm forward to the inside of your right knee. Bend your elbow and wrap your arm around the front of your shin. Reach your left arm behind you and hold your left wrist with your right hand. If you can't join your hands behind your back, use a strap to bridge the gap between your hands.

Once you are in the posture, shift your attention to the Bakasana-like actions. In Bakasana, you slide your upper arms down the front of your shins, squeeze your inner legs firmly into your outer arms, and spread your upper back and shoulder blades. So, work your right arm a little lower and press it firmly against the front of your shin. At the same time, strongly adduct, or squeeze, your right shin against your arm and allow your entire spine to slightly round forward. Feel your upper back broaden as your shoulder blades spread away from your spine. Take 5 or 6 deep breaths into the back of your heart and lungs before coming out of the pose. Take your second side.

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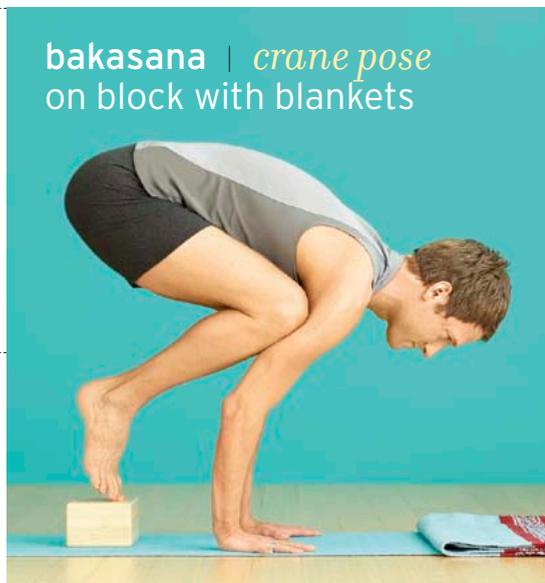
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Photographed by Cortnee Loren Brown

propping Squat on a block with a blanket or two placed on your mat in front of you.

why this works Squatting on a block elevates your feet and hips. If you are like most people, this will make it easier to work your shins up your arms toward your armpits. In the event of a crash landing, a blanket or two will soften the experience.

how to Place a block in the middle of your mat and a folded blanket or two across the front of the mat. Squat on top of the block with the insides of your feet touching and your heels lifted. Separate your knees slightly wider than your shoulders. With your hands on the floor a few inches in front of you, fold your torso forward, bend your elbows, and slide the back of your upper arms down the front of your shins. Root down through the base of your fingers and lean forward until your forearms are vertical. The weight of your body will naturally shift from your feet to your hands.



Once your toes have lifted away from the block and you've taken flight, it's time to re-create the actions that you learned in Malasana and Marichyasana I. Press firmly into the floor with your hands and encourage your upper back to round toward the ceiling. Your shoulder blades will move away from the spine, spreading

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outward like wings. One way to facilitate this is to imagine that you are opening the back of your heart and lungs instead of the front.

Squeeze your legs strongly into your outer arms—just as you did in Marichyasana I. This action helps carry the

weight of your pelvis and distributes the work of the posture more evenly. Feel the coordinated actions of the arms, shoulder blades, upper back, and legs as you breathe smoothly. After a few breaths, lower your feet back to the block and rest for a few moments before repeating the pose 2 or 3 times. ❖

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