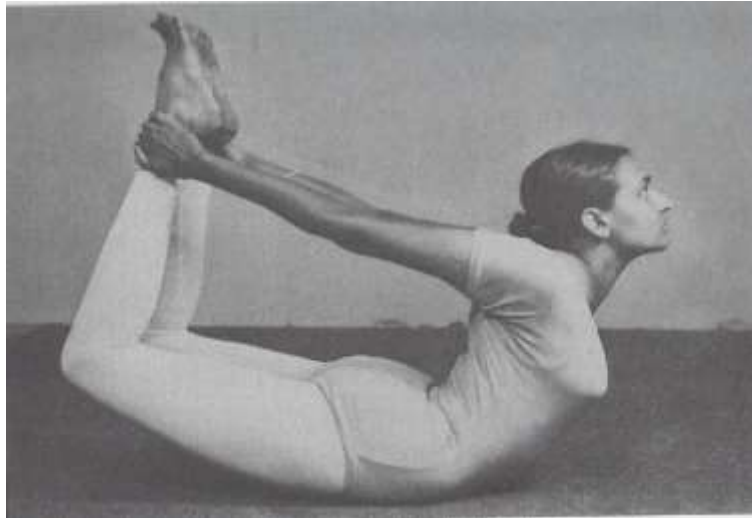


Developing Dhanurasana: Use of a Bolster

Susanne Bulington, Intermediate Jr 1 CIYT, RYT-500
Meadville, MS



Yoga: A Gem for Women, Plate 136

In the above image, Plate 136 from *Yoga: A Gem for Women*, we see a *Dhanurasana* that is characterized by a lifted and expansive chest, externally rotated shoulders, lengthening anterior and lumbar spine, well lifted knees with lengthening front thighs and inner groins, and a state of balance on the lower abdominal area.



Dhanurasana – Before

When practicing prone backbends, my first attempts at *Dhanurasana* are often lacking in these essential elements of the pose. I've found that a bolster incorporated in a variety of ways helps me create a fuller expression of the pose.

BOLSTER PLACEMENT: UNDER THE LOWER RIBCAGE/ABDOMEN



I begin with the bolster positioned under the lower ribcage/abdomen. With my legs straight, I turn the back thighs out to broaden the hamstrings and alternately lift and lengthen the legs. Before bending the legs to take the feet in the hands, I press my hands down into the bolster to lift my front body up and create anterior spine length by extending forward from the naval to the sternum. The support of the bolster under the lower ribcage/abdomen helps me maintain that anterior length as I bend my legs and take the ankles with my hands. With the center of gravity shifted away from the upper body, the lift created by the bolster in this position generates more ease to move the low back ribs toward the head and the buttocks toward the back knees lengthening the lumbar spine.

BOLSTER PLACEMENT: UNDER THE CHEST



Next, I position the bolster under the chest. I want to recreate maximal length in the anterior spine. Similar to the last variation, I place my hands behind the bolster, lift the front body up and lengthen forward from the naval to the sternum. Once I am holding my ankles, the bolster positioned in this fashion gives lovely support for freedom in the upper body elements of the pose: external rotation of the shoulders and backward reaching of the arms, broadening of the collarbones, and lift and expansion of the chest.

BOLSTER PLACEMENT: UNDER THE LOWER PELVIS/UPPER THIGH



In a third variation, I position the bolster under the lower pelvis and upper thigh. This has multiple effects. The thighs and knees are lifted by the bolster which

lessens the impact of gravity on the lower body. Reducing the burden of gravity, I find more ease as I use my hands to lift my feet. As I lift my feet higher, I feel increased front thigh and inner groin lengthening. With the bolster elevating the lower body in this variation, the center of gravity is shifted onto the abdomen in a similar to the classic pose.



Dhanurasana – After

Finally, I practice the pose several times without the bolster. As intended, the bolster leaves imprints that hold my attention as I work to recreate those enhanced elements of the pose without the aid of the prop. The investigation continues.

“Everyday practice has to be accompanied by a spirit of research so that the intellect may penetrate deeper and deeper.”

Yoga: A Gem for Women
Dr. Geeta S. Iyengar