

## Urdhva Mukha Svanasana — Upward Dog

If practiced incorrectly, all of the risks outlined for Cobra pose will also present themselves for *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*.

Stress to the spine can be minimized by tucking the tail, restraining the lower ribs to avoid excessive bending at the T12-L1 joint, and not throwing the head back, thus avoiding all sharp bends —hinge points — to the spine.

A healthier way to think about back bends is to view them as “front conditioning stretches.” With this perspective, the emphasis will be shifted from the arching of the back to the strengthening of the more movable parts of the front of the body (i.e. ribs and neck) while simultaneously lengthening its more restricted areas (i.e. quads, groin and upper chest). This intention will bring more balance and aliveness to the front and avoid compression of the spine when bending backward.

In the pose shown in Figure 3.39 the head is thrown back and the hands are positioned slightly ahead of the shoulders, which increases the tendency to hinge in the lumbar region as highlighted by the arrow.

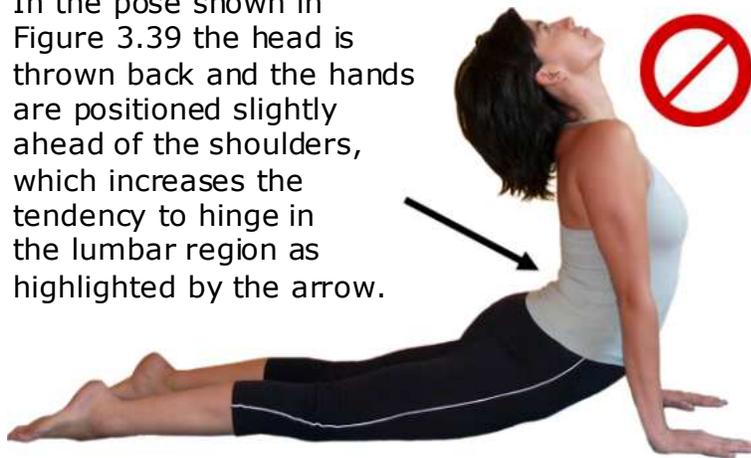


Fig. 3.39

In the pose displayed in Figure 3.40 neither the cervical, nor the lumbar spine are over-extended.

Compression to the lumbar area is minimized by keeping active legs, tucked tail and hands under the shoulders.

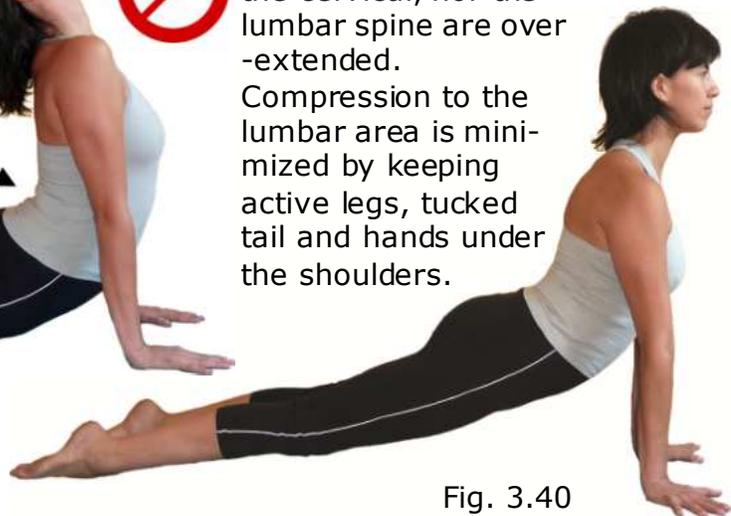


Fig. 3.40

Because this pose is included in many vinyasa routines and is performed many times, the slightest stress or misalignment is amplified by the repetition. Repetition can also lead to fatigue, and when the body is tired poses can become less precise, ligaments and bones become stressed and the risk of injury is greatly increased.



Fig. 3.41

The Thai massage technique depicted in Figure 3.41 is often used as a preparation for back bends. It can be a risky stretch if the sitting position of the partner inhibits pelvic rotation without encouraging, or even allowing, enough tucking of the tail bone.

The extra lifting of the upper body by the pull to the arms can be **dangerous** because it leads to compression of the spine.

## Lateral Bend — Lumbar

### *Utthita Trikonasana*— Extended Triangle

*Trikonasana* is not a problematic pose if done with the sacrum and spine aligned as shown in Figure 3.42 (the direction of the spine is marked with a white line). However, due to poor instruction or an overly enthusiastic performance, collapsing of the underside of the waist as shown in Figure 3.43 is usually seen. This indicates that the lateral bend is coming from the lumbar spine rather than from the hip joints.



Fig. 3.42

A mild lateral bend in the lumbar is not harmful. Nonetheless, if repeated often, as may happen in a regular yoga practice, the associated stress on the ligaments of the sacroiliac (SI) joints may result in joint instability.

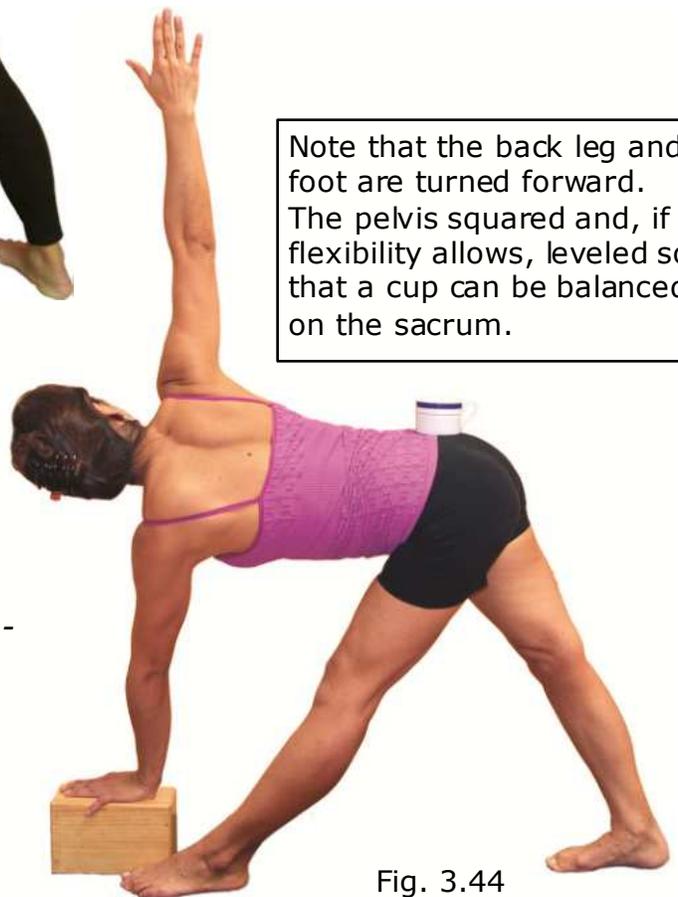


Fig. 3.43

The problem of SI instability has become so prevalent among yoga teachers and dedicated students that many teachers and schools are no longer practicing/teaching the variation of the pose shown in Figure 3.43.

A much safer variation of *Utthita Trikonasana* is shown in Figure 3.44.

This pose uses the same alignment principles of *Parivrtta Trikonasana* (revolving triangle) but with the rotation of the upper body away from the front leg.



Note that the back leg and foot are turned forward. The pelvis squared and, if flexibility allows, leveled so that a cup can be balanced on the sacrum.

Fig. 3.44