

## TEACHING HEADSTAND

Teaching headstand clearly and safely is one of our greatest responsibilities as yoga teachers

- students can be afraid - lose sense of where they are (disoriented)
- can fall and hurt another in class

LYTTC STUDENTS ARE NOT TO TEACH HEADSTAND UNTIL LYTTC IS FINISHED unless:

- you PERSONALLY have had a DIRECT conversation with a course director and have been given the go ahead
- you are confident practicing headstand yourself
- you have attended the LYTTC course headstand teaching skills workshop

In order to teach headstand before the end of the LYTTC you must satisfy all three of the above criteria.

### Headstand Pros and Cons:

#### Headstand pros

focussing and centring, energising

said to be good for metabolism - pituitary gland and pineal gland

said to be good for balance and energy

good for alignment

strengthening

good for stiff hips and knees - and arthritis in those areas

strong pose; king asana

in a well aligned headstand the practitioner will experience a mild jalandhara bandha ( i.e length at the back of the neck, deep tone at the front); in fact all the all bandhas can be felt

in a good headstand in one's gravity line

good for piles – prolapse (takes pressure off the pelvic floor) - varicose veins

can be good when recovering from spinal disc probs, if careful going in and out of it

good for general circulation

good re vitality

good re loss of memory

warming

good for constipation

variations strengthen upper body, thighs, abdominal muscles, mobilise hips  
works low back muscles on way up and down  
twists; tone kidneys and internal organs  
good for throat/ colds, sinus probs if not in pain  
good for confidence

### **Headstand cons**

tendency to tense up when starting; can compress neck,  
hearing can be affected by tension  
get drs OK

menstruation: no physiological reason not to do it, but student may not feel like it  
fibroids: deep folding may be uncomfortable, which would make the preparation difficult in  
avoid with the young when bones are still growing and proportions not yet settled - do 3 pt  
head balance instead

not good for hbp or lbp – if unstable/ not medicated

not for glaucoma, retina probs (Nb. diabetes – should be having regular eye checks)

not for acute heart and circulatory probs; not for emphysema/ acute asthma

Not last thing at night unless part of a balanced practice with shoulderstand as a  
counterpose

Not immediately on waking in the morning; warm up and prepare first

not for those w bloodshot eyes

not for bad headache

not for those showing nobble at back of neck - i.e excessive rounding out of  
cervical/thoracic spine in the preparation is a sign that student is not ready - neck has to  
lengthen first

### **When to start pupils practicing it:**

- when you are sure shoulders have loosened a fair bit and some spine/core muscles developed
  - nb teach shoulderstand til they can do it well before head stand
- when spine can lengthen in the preparation (i.e good distance between ears and shoulders), elbows can anchor, and no 'nobbles' in back of neck i.e excessive rounding out of cervical/thoracic spine is a sign that student is not ready

Better to do 3 pt when:

- young and still growing: head is large in proportion to body, length of neck to upper arms

- TIGHT SHOULDERS
  - E.g find poses such as cow pose arms and elbow dog difficult re shoulders/upper back
- UPPER ARM TO HEAD/NECK LENGTH PROPORTIONS

**Alignment in the preparation** is all important; it is the key to the whole pose  
 Make sure students **BREATHE!**

- look at people in elbow dog; teacher can anchor student's elbows with his/her hands
  - Nb teacher doesn't anchor pupil's elbows in headstand unless experienced student (cuts off escape root)
- Cat preparation: moving through flexed cat pose on forearms and placing crown of head on floor
  - check from in front and behind:
    - look at vertebrae when kneeling forward in flexed cat - spine has to be able to lengthen up
    - CHECK NECK/head position, practice anchoring elbows
- walk in:
  - get student to open their legs so teacher can check head position to see how head and neck are aligned
    - CHECK CHIN
  - elbows in line with shoulders; any unevenness needs to be sorted out
- Any discomfort in head/neck: come down, ease off, and then attempt preparation again

**What to look for :**

- **head and neck:** tension in face/eyes/throat and how to help it
  - breathe from **ears to shoulders** to lengthen neck, relax jaw, keep shoulders wide
- look at alignment through neck
- look at weight bearing through elbows

**How to help - how not to help:**

- Basic help tactics on going up *and down*:
  - look at alignment before going up
    - on going up and down the teacher must be prepared to help support weight, therefore teacher must also have a stable base

- any helping movement is only for what feels free and possible, and coupled with student's outbreath
  - hands around pelvis
  - how to support with side of knee; never push foot into back
  - if student feels very heavy when they take feet off the floor they are probably not ready to go up – would suggest they are unable to anchor and find support themselves
- NB never cut off exit place/ safety valve i.e only anchor elbows in basic headstand of the confident; do not anchor those in variations (too distracting)
- Helping someone once in a headstand:
  - Stabilizing:
    - teacher's hands on sides of pelvis
    - breathing: awareness of back of body
    - feeling stable in headstand is about trusting the base of the pose and breathing with full muscular support of the relevant breathing areas
  - 
  - Alignment:
    - look at, and encourage student to notice, how weight is distributed through elbows; anchor tighter side first; then check weaker side
    - touch gently spot on lower spine to help them lengthen
    - never touch genitals, kidneys, soft tissue areas
    - any discomfort in neck/head **come down**
- Good alternative for students who are learning:
  - practicing in a corner

**Counterpose:** shoulderstand