

Iyoga chair and 'Benger' backbend extension users' guide

Background

The Iyoga Chair and "Benger" backbend extension is a new and versatile adaptation of BKS Iyengar's classic "backbend bench" design.

BKS Iyengar is widely regarded as one of the world's foremost teachers of yoga asana. His technique emphasises precise alignment and deep absorption in each pose.

Based at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute in Puna, India, Mr Iyengar's inspirational teaching has spawned hundreds of "Iyengar Yoga" schools around the world. Now in his eighties, he maintains an active interest in the teaching program at the Institute.

Fundamental to Mr. Iyengar's approach is the notion of practicing each pose in a way which is appropriate to the experience and fitness of the student. To that end he has developed a number of yoga "props". Props assist the practice of those unable to achieve the deepest version of a pose where the use of a prop may not otherwise be necessary. Props are also used to enable students to stay in a pose for a longer time than would otherwise be possible especially during a "restorative" practice.

Mr Iyengar developed the backbend bench to assist with the practice of back bends or poses involving spinal extension (arching the spine backwards). Mr Iyengar has also demonstrated the use of chairs as an aid in the practice of many yoga asanas.

The Iyoga Chair and "Benger" backbend extension is a versatile prop for home or yoga school use.

The "Benger" backbend attachment was designed by Peter Harley an Iyengar Yoga teacher and industrial designer from Melbourne, Australia. Alone and in combination with the chair it enables the practitioner to perform a variety of supported backbend poses. The following is a guide to its safe use. Instruction is also given for some of the poses which can be practiced using the chair alone.

Assembly

When used together, the small hooks on the benger are inserted into the holes in the front bar of the seat of the chair.



Note: many chairs can be adapted for the attachment of the benger simply by drilling two 10mm diameter holes into the front edge or bar of the seat 160mm apart.

Safe use of the Iyoga Chair and Benger

- 1 Read these instructions carefully
- 2 We strongly recommend that before using the chair and Benger, especially in the case of spinal injury, that you seek the instruction and advice of a qualified Iyengar Yoga teacher. If such a teacher is not available we recommend the assistance of a teacher with experience in the Iyengar method or with the use of yoga props.
- 3 At all times when using the chair and Benger
 - avoid any use which causes undue pressure or pain in any part of the spine or neck, especially in the lumbar spine*
 - Never sit upright from the chair and Benger, always slide off onto the floor and roll onto your side before sitting up or use your arms to push you up to the sitting position from below

The principle pose for which the chair and Benger was designed is Viparita Dandasana, see fig 1.1 The safe practice of this pose is described here.

Intelligent practice of back bends can be very beneficial to the health of the spine but must be approached with caution. The teaching of Iyengar yoga emphasises this cautious approach. Particular care is given in back bends to the state of the lumbar spine*

*Lumbar spine: the lower section of the spine between the rib cage and the pelvis.

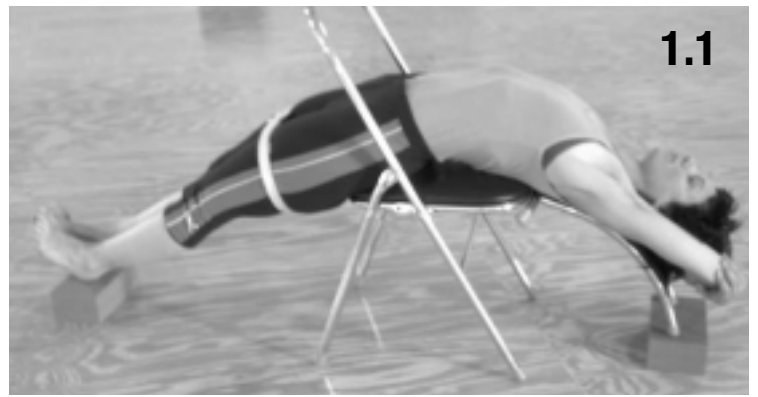
1 Viparita Dandasana (Inverted staff pose)

1.1 Normal set up for the pose using blocks (or books) to support the benger and feet of the practitioner. If the practice of the supported backbend causes discomfort in the lower back slide further over the chair in the direction of the feet. [Picture 1.1]

Note the position of the shoulders in relation to the chair and the use of a belt around the thighs to prevent external rotation of the legs

1.2 Full pose for more experienced and flexible practitioners. [Picture 1.2]

Never sit upright from the chair and Benger, always slide off onto the floor and roll onto your side before sitting up or grip the front legs of the chair and use your arms to push yourself back up to the sitting position from below.



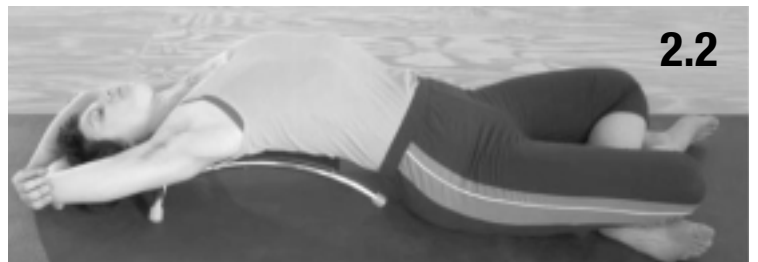
2 Matsyasana (Lord of the fishes pose)

This is a more gentle backbend pose designed to isolate the backbend in the mid to upper spine (thoracic spine). [Pictures 1.2 and 2.2]

Caution- The practitioner should never sit upright from the backbend. Bend your knees and roll off the benger to the side before coming onto the hands and knees.

Care should be taken not to strain the neck as in Picture 2.3.

If the neck is extended support should be taken for the head as in Picture 2.4.



3 Supported Supta Virasana (Supine hero pose)

[Picture 3] Taller people should also use support for the head.

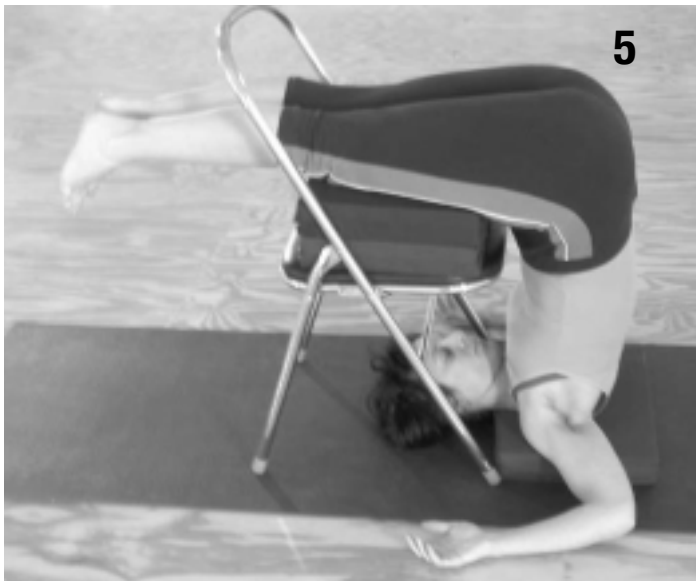
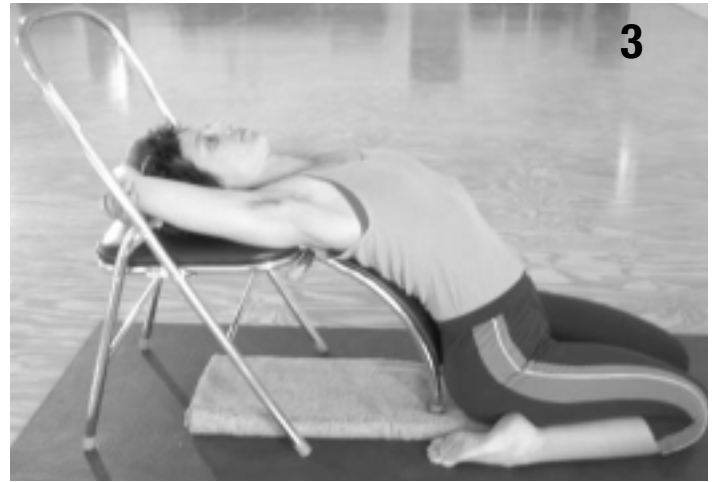
Other poses for which the chair may be used

4 Supported Savangasana (shoulder stand)

Shoulders should be elevated on a firm surface such as folded blankets [Picture 4]

5 Supported Halasana (Plough pose)

Shoulders should be elevated on a firm surface such as folded blankets [Picture 5]

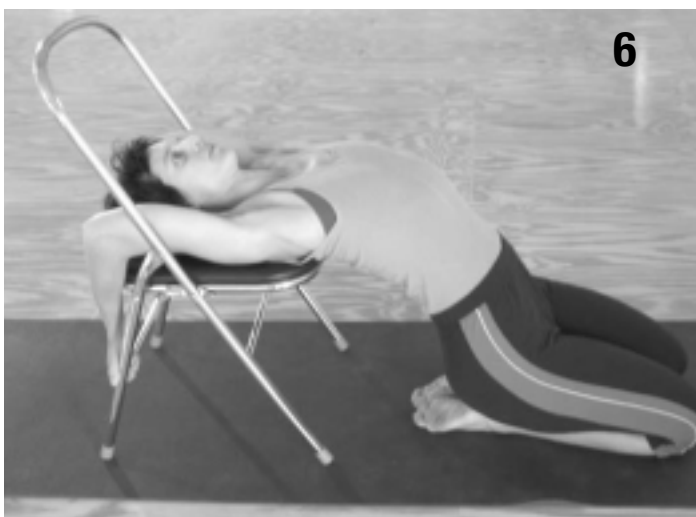


6 Supported shoulder stretch

[Picture 6] May also be practiced in squatting position.

7 Set Bandha Savangasana (Bridge pose)

Benger can also be used in conjunction with a Setu Bandha bench and blocks for the practice of Setu Bandha. [Picture 7] Shoulders, neck and head should be elevated according to height and flexibility of practitioner.



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