

Locust Pose

Shalabhasana

sha-la-BAHS-anna)

salabha = grasshopper, locust



A strong back and core are important to runners. They help keep your torso upright, allowing for more oxygen into your lungs. In addition, a strong core helps you run more efficiently, helping to keep you injury-free. Locust is a simple but challenging pose that's excellent for building strength and flexibility in the back. It is a counter-stretch to the Plow and Shoulder-Stand.

The blueprint

The practitioner lies on the floor with arms stretched back and legs raised toward the sky at a 45 degree angle while keeping the lower ribs and pelvis on the mat.

How to do it

1. Lie on your stomach with your arms along your sides, palms up, forehead resting on the floor. Rotate your thighs by turning your big toes toward each other; firm your buttocks so your coccyx presses toward your pubis. Inhale.
2. Exhale while lifting your head, upper torso, arms, and legs off the floor. You'll be resting on your lower ribs, belly, and front pelvis.
3. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and stretch them back actively through your fingertips. Press your scapulas firmly into your back.
4. Gaze forward or slightly upward. Keep the back of the neck long.
5. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute, then release with an exhalation. Take a few breaths and repeat 1 or 2 times more if you like.

Do:

- keep your head in a neutral position by looking down at the floor if you have a neck injury
- reach through your legs, first through the heels to lengthen the back legs, then through the bases of the big toes.

Don't:

- jut your chin forward

Benefits

- Strengthens the muscles of the spine, buttocks and backs of the arms and legs
- Stretches the shoulders, chest, belly, and thighs
- Improves posture
- Increases flexibility in the back
- Especially recommended for relieving sciatica and pain in the lower back

Contraindications

- Headache
- Serious back injury
- Pregnancy

Beginners' tips and modifications

If you need help holding the pose, try placing a rolled up blanket beneath your upper thighs.

You can also start out by raising just one leg at a time.

Advanced practitioners

Instead of stretching the legs straight back from the pelvis at a 45 degree angle, bend the knees and position the shins perpendicular to the floor. Once this is mastered, bend the knees and relax, letting the feet gradually come down until they are resting on top of the head.