



by Robin Weiss

## TIP: Seated Forward Bend

Want to unwind and refocus? Try stretching your spine, shoulders and hamstrings (backs of your thighs) with the Seated Forward Bend yoga pose. According to traditional text, the Seated Forward Bend (the pose's original name, Paschimottanasana, literally translates as "intense stretch of the west,") can help your distracted mind unwind--among other things that I won't address here.

The key to achieving the full benefit of the Seated Forward Bend is in doing it correctly. I'm writing this tip because this pose is one of several important and highly effective stretches that I often see done incorrectly. Here's a step-by-step, detailed breakdown:

- **Sit on the floor** with your buttocks supported on a folded blanket and your legs straight in front of you. Press actively through your heels. Rock slightly onto your left buttock, and pull your right sitting bone away from the heel with your right hand. Repeat on the other side. Turn the tops of your thighs in slightly and press them down into the floor. Press through your palms or fingertips on the floor beside your hips and lift the top of your sternum toward the ceiling as the tops of your thighs descend into the floor.
- **Draw your inner groins deep** into the pelvis. Inhale, and keeping your front torso long, *lean forward from your hip joints, not your waist*. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of your pelvis. If possible grab the sides of your feet with your hands, thumbs on your soles, elbows fully extended; if this isn't possible, loop a strap around the sole of your foot, and hold the strap firmly. Be sure your elbows are straight, not bent.
- **When you're ready** to go further, don't forcefully pull yourself into the forward bend, whether your hands are on your feet or holding the strap. Always *lengthen your front torso into the pose, keeping your head raised*. If you are holding your feet, bend your elbows out to the sides and lift them away from the floor; if holding the strap, lighten your grip and walk your hands forward, keeping your arms long. *Your lower belly should touch your thighs first, then your upper belly, then your ribs, and your head last.*
- **With each inhalation**, lift and lengthen your front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend. In this way your torso oscillates and lengthens almost imperceptibly with your breath. Eventually you may be able to stretch your arms out beyond your feet on the floor.

- **Stay in the pose** anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes. To come up, first lift your torso away from your thighs and straighten your elbows again if they are bent. Then inhale and lift your torso up by pulling your tailbone down and into your pelvis.

### **Modifications with Props**

Unless you are quite limber in your hamstrings, spine, and shoulders, you'll probably need to hold a strap around your feet. Sitting up on a folded blanket can make this pose more comfortable if you have very tight hamstrings. If you are extremely stiff, you can place a rolled up blanket under your knees as well.

### **Deepening the Pose**

Once you are fully in the Seated Forward Bend you can re-extend your elbows. There are several ways to do this. You can clasp your hands around the soles of your feet, or turn the back of one hand to your soles and grip its wrist with your other hand. You can also place a block against the soles of your feet and grip its sides with your hands.

### **Tips**

Never force yourself into a forward bend, especially when sitting on the floor. If you feel the space between your pubis and navel shortening, stop, lift up slightly, and lengthen again. *Because of tightness in the backs of your legs, your forward bend may not go very far forward and might look more like sitting up straight. That's OK. You'll progress from there.*

Reference: [www.yogajournal.com](http://www.yogajournal.com) 2008