

1. Clasp ing position (man on top).

Vatsyayana says ‘the legs of both the male and the female are stretched straight out.’

Have a go

It might seem rather disappointing that the *Kama Sutra* should include the most ‘basic’ and best-known position in the world. But, after all, the missionary position is popular precisely because it’s so good. Vatsyayana could hardly exclude it. With the woman lying comfortably on her back and the man lying between her open thighs, supporting himself on his hands or elbows, it’s intimate, allowing for kissing, talking, eye contact and a range of caresses. The man is slightly but not unduly dominant - which suits the psychology of most couples most of the time.

The drawback with the basic missionary is that movement is restricted. Vatsyayana’s *Clasp ing Position* can be improved by the addition of a nice, thick pillow under the woman’s buttocks. Not only is her *yoni* now raised for some intensive cunnilingus but the man can, for example, arrange himself on one knee with the other leg out behind for a powerful and versatile pattern of thrusting. With the man’s weight taken off her the woman is also more free to move.

2. Clasp ing position (lying side by side).

Vatsyayana says this is the same as the previous position but with the man laying on his left side and the woman laying on her right side.

Have a go

From the man-on-top version, simply roll onto your sides without disengaging. This is a nicely relaxed posture in which you can just do nothing for a while. When it’s necessary to raise the temperature a little the man can make the occasional thrust. When it’s necessary to raise the temperature a lot he can lift his partner’s upper leg for a view of her genitals and thrust more vigorously.

After one side you can ignore Vatsyayana's advice about the man always being on his left side, roll right over to the opposite side and do it all again.

3. Babhravya's pressing position

Vatsyayana sees this as a variation on either of the *Clasping Positions*. Burton and Arbuthnot's translation says the woman 'presses her lover with her thighs'. Some modern writers have taken this to mean that she presses her lover's *body* but I'm convinced it really means that she actually presses or squeezes his *lingam*.

Have a go

If I'm right, this means that the woman's legs are pressed together to create a feeling of tightness in the vagina. Some translations say the woman does it herself while at least one other says it's the man who pushes the woman's thighs together. In terms of effect it doesn't make much difference. It's not so much a position as a technique which can be used in a number of different postures. You can do it, for example, in the *Clasping Position* (see above) the *Rising Position* (see below) and several others.

4. Twining position

Burton and Arbuthnot translate Vatsyayana as writing that the woman 'places one of her thighs across the thigh of her lover'. But that would be so banal as to be hardly worth mentioning. I believe the correct interpretation is that the woman places one of her thighs *across her other thigh*. In other words, she's intensifying the squeeze created by *Babhravya's Pressing Position*.

Have a go

Still in a *Clasping* (missionary) position, the woman crosses her thighs. Both of you will be intensely aware of the *lingam* inside the *yoni*, but the man will have to be careful not to be squeezed out. Crossing the thighs is also possible in other positions, such as the *Rising Position* (below).

5. The widely opened position.

Vatsyayana says that this involves the woman lowering her head and raising her 'middle parts'.

Have a go

The woman lies with her head just slightly over the edge of the bed, opens her thighs and lifts her hips by placing her feet flat on the bed and pushing up. This opens the vagina, hence the title. It also causes a rush of blood to the head, which some women like. If you don't, then keep your head on the bed. As a more comfortable variation, but with less tension, a woman can support her hips on two or three pillows. Compared with laying flat on the bed, this method of raising the *yoni* has two particular advantages. Firstly the woman's vulva is far more easily accessible for cunnilingus. Secondly, the man now squatting or kneeling instead of lying, can move freely and tantalise his partner with a range of techniques.

6. Babhravya's yawning position

Vatsyayana says the woman keeps her thighs 'suspended' and spread 'wide apart'.

Have a go

As the name suggests, while the woman lays on her back her legs are well-opened and held up half-way between the horizontal and the vertical. This is a position which sets up tremendous tension for the woman, as well as stretching the 'sex nerve' along the inside of the thighs. It can quickly lead to orgasm. But no woman could maintain this position for very long. When you get tired, rest your thighs on your partner's thighs (if he's in a kneeling position) or squeeze your legs against his waist.

7. *The rising position*

Vatsyayana says this is when 'the female raises both of her thighs straight up'.

Have a go

This is one of those positions that sounds perfectly straightforward but isn't. If a woman has both legs straight up in the air, and together, it's impossible for a man to penetrate without a little ingenuity. If you don't believe me, try it. As Yashodhara points out, the woman's *yonis* needs to be raised. The easiest way of achieving that is simply to put a couple of pillows under the woman's hips or, alternatively, from the *Clasping Position*, the man can kneel up hauling his partner's legs up with him as he goes. Another idea is for the woman to lay with her vulva at the edge of the bed while the man stands. Yet another possibility is for the man to open his legs and encircle his partner with his feet by her head. A fifth solution is for the man to lay *sideways* to his partner, a position nowadays known as the T.

8. *Suvarnanabha's yawning position.*

Vatsyayana says that this is when the woman 'raises both of her legs and places them on her lover's shoulders.'

Have a go

As Vatsyayana doesn't say where her lover is when she places her legs on his shoulders there are all kinds of possibilities. The most straightforward is that, from the *Clasping Position* with the man kneeling, the woman bends her legs up and draws them back so as to be able to place them on the man's shoulders. The man will have to move his arms (one at a time so as not to lose his balance) to allow his partner's legs to pass. You could stay like this but things get even more exciting if, once the man's arms are around the back of the woman's legs, he can lean forwards, maintaining penetration, and, by gently pushing her thighs with his arms, tilts her pelvis up. In other words, the woman is now lying on her back, as before, but with her knees more or less on her breasts and with her calves and feet sticking up in the air. He can follow

the movement by rising into a squatting position, or squatting on one leg with the other out behind. She can place her arms behind her knees or even, if she's supple enough, hold her ankles with her hands. For a man this is very much a position of conquest. His partner is utterly vulnerable. For that reason some women may object to it but those that don't will enjoy the combination of deep penetration, strong pressure on the vulva and the exhibitionism of openly displaying their *yonis*. The erotic charge for the man may be increased by pushing the woman into the position and *then* penetrating. This allows the man to see her *yoni* utterly exposed before, as it were, taking possession of it, while the woman can with satisfaction see in his eyes the excitement she is creating.

9. Suwarnanabha's pressed position

Vatsyayana says the legs are 'contracted and thus held by the lover before his bosom'.

Have a go

This is an easier version of the *Position of Indrani* (see next chapter). The woman, on her back, brings her knees to her breasts and places her feet on the chest of her partner, who will be kneeling. It's possible to make an enjoyable game out of this position. By pushing on his chest the woman can hold her partner away, a signal for him to tantalise her by keeping his penis just at the entrance to her vagina. Or she can relax slightly, a signal for him to plunge all the way in.

10. Suwarnanabha's half-pressed position

Vatsyayana says one of the woman's legs is 'stretched out.'

Have a go

This is a variation on the preceding position in which the woman keeps one foot on her lover's chest while stretching her other leg out straight. It can make her feel a little more open and sexy.

11. Crab's position

Vatsyayana says this is 'when both the legs of the woman are contracted and placed on her stomach.'

Have a go

With the woman on her back and the man kneeling, the woman bends her knees, splays her thighs open a little and rests her feet on her partner's hips. Her legs are now, indeed, like a crab's retracted claws. It's a comfortable position for a woman and good for tantalising the entrance to her *yoni* as well as her G-spot.

12. Lotus-like position

This is not the full lotus but, as Vatsyayana says, merely with the calves 'placed one upon the other'.

Have a go

The idea of anything to do with the lotus position sounds pretty daunting but this is actually quite easy for most women. The woman, on her back, pulls her knees back towards her shoulders, crosses her legs at the ankles and brings her feet as close as possible to her upper thighs. Obviously, she has to keep her feet clear of her *yoni* and it helps at first if she takes hold of her feet with her hands. The man, kneeling, now penetrates, pushing against her feet with his stomach. It sounds uncomfortable but it isn't. Its advantage is that it opens the *yoni* quite erotically and is very Oriental.

13. Supported congress

Vatsyayana says this is ‘when a man and a woman support themselves on each other’s bodies, or on a wall or pillar, and thus while standing engage in congress.’

Have a go

The advantage of a standing position is that it’s something you can do anywhere. Well, not *anywhere*, but you know what I mean. Vatsyayana didn’t specify any particular way of going about things so let’s take a look at the possibilities. Seldom will *lingam* and *yoni* meet up without some assistance. For a face-to-face encounter it’s usually a question of raising the woman up. A pair of high heels are a modern and enjoyable solution. Another is to make love on the stairs where height problems are easily resolved. It helps bring the *yoni* into alignment if the woman lifts one foot off the ground and wraps her leg around her partner. Or, if the man stands with his back near to a wall, the woman can put one foot on the wall.

Ancient carvings and paintings also show standing sex *from behind*. It sounds impossible without the woman bending over but it isn’t. The secret is for the woman to lean *a little* forwards, placing one hand on a wall for support, and lift one of her legs backwards. The man takes hold of her calf and raises her leg sufficiently to swivel her *yoni* to the rear.

14. Congress of a cow

Vatsyayana says that this is when ‘a woman stands on her hands and feet like a quadruped.’

Have a go

Although Vatsyayana recommends copying ‘the different animals’ this is the only rear-entry position he actually describes. And, in fact, as a rear-entry position it has little to recommend it except for female ejaculation (see Chapter 11). It’s uncomfortable and the woman risks being pushed over. It

works far better if the woman can place her hands on something higher than the ground for support such as a chair or the side of the bed. However, its great advantage is that you can do it in places like the shower or out-of-doors without having to find any comfortable place to lie down.

15. The position of Indrani

Indrani was the wife of the god Indra, so this ought to be a pretty special position – and it is. Vatsyayana says the woman ‘places her thighs with her legs doubled on them upon her sides.

Have a go

Some modern illustrated editions of the *Kama Sutra* show the woman with her thighs against her breasts but this is not strictly correct. Vatsyayana says the position of Indrani is ‘learned only by practice’ so it has to be considerably more difficult than that. Early stone carvings show how it should be done. The woman lies on her back on the bed and pulls her knees back not against her breasts but *under her armpits*, with her thighs as closely against her sides as possible and her calves closely against her thighs. Feet should be fairly near to the bed, not up in the air. You can help get into position by putting your arms around your thighs or, better still, taking hold of your feet with your hands. It’s a position which has the advantage of displaying the *yoni* to the maximum while creating enormous muscular tension. However, it requires the sort of very open and mobile hip joints that only gymnasts would have. If you’re not a gymnast just do your best or stick to the easier *Suvarnanabha’s Pressed Position* (see previous chapter).

16. Splitting of a bamboo

Vatsyayana describes this as the woman alternately placing ‘one of her legs on her lover’s shoulder’ and stretching the other out.

Have a go

This is one of those positions that burns a lot of calories. With the man kneeling and the woman on her back, the woman puts one ankle on her partner's shoulder and stretches the other leg straight out. She then switches, so that the leg that was up on the man's shoulder becomes the one to be stretched out. The best thing the man can do to help is keep his arms out of the way. The whole idea is to give a sort of 'chewing' motion to the vagina, so the leg positions need to be alternated fairly rapidly. It's tricky at first but, like everything, becomes easier with practice.

17. Fixing of a nail

Vatsyayana says this is when one of the woman's legs 'is placed on the head and the other is stretched out.'

Have a go

The question is, whose head is the woman's leg placed on? Some modern illustrated manuals show the woman placing her heel against the *man's* forehead. But Vatsyayana says the position is 'learned by practice only' which means that interpretation is far too easy. If we look at yoga positions, which go back as far as at least 3000 BCE in the Indus Valley, we can better understand what Vatsyayana intended. *Eka Pada Sirasana* is a pose in which the yogini places one of her feet *behind* her head, while *Dwipada Sirasana* requires *both* feet to be placed behind the head. Obviously this is the kind of thing Vatsyayana had in mind, with the aim of increasing the muscular tension and opening the *yoni*. Very few women will actually be able to get their feet as far as their heads but do your best to get one foot as close as possible.

18. Turning position

Vatsyayana describes this as the man turning round and enjoying the woman 'without leaving her'.

Have a go

This is a lot of fun (and the woman is going to have a go as well – see *The top* below). The idea is for the man to begin in the missionary position and then, *without disengaging*, to slowly turn like the sail of a windmill so that he is sideways to his partner, then facing her feet, then sideways again and, finally, back in the missionary position. It helps to be well-endowed and to have a steel-like erection, otherwise it's all too easy to slip out.

19. Acting the part of a man

Vatsyayana says that a woman can act 'the part of a man' when her lover is tired, to satisfy his curiosity or to satisfy her own desire for novelty. In other words, she's on top. 'At such a time,' he wrote, 'with flowers in her hair hanging loose, and her smiles broken by hard breathings, she should press upon her lover's bosom with her own breasts; and, lowering her head frequently, she should do in return the same actions which he used to do.'

Have a go

Vatsyayana suggests that from the *Clasping Position* and without disengaging, a woman should simply roll her lover sideways until she's on top. In other words, this is the inverted missionary. A woman could also start on top but the rolling over is a lot more fun – keep tightly hold of one another so the *lingam* doesn't slide out. However the woman gets on top she can lay with her legs open or along those of her partner.

20. The top and the swing

According to Vatsyayana, this is when a woman is on top of a man and 'turns round like a wheel'.

Have a go

This, like the *Turning Position*, is something that can introduce a lot of fun into sex. While *sitting* on top of the man, the woman turns to face sideways, then the man's feet, then to face the other side, and finally returns to the face-to-face position once again. Vatsyayana suggests the man 'lifts up the middle part of his body.' In other words, he puts his feet and hands on the bed and pushes up. This is the kind of position men like to get women into so it's only fair if women turn the tables now and then. In fact, by thrusting up, the man is less likely to slip out, so it has a practical purpose. It sounds almost impossible but it isn't as long as the woman always keeps weight on one leg while turning. But if you do find it impossible, then, as illustrations show, the ancient Hindus always had cushions and couches at the ready. Much better to make use of such a prop. A couple, at least, of very plump cushions under the man's buttocks will give him the necessary support. Or he could lie, face up, across the sort of low stool or pouffe that was recommended in *Chapter 05*. For some women, the prominence given to the man's genitals, can be very exciting. The woman needs to remember that her vagina is angled back up towards her spine at about 45 degrees so it'll help if she leans forwards a little when facing her partner's feet.

The *Swing Variation* requires the women to swing her vagina around in all directions (in other words, churn) as she turns. This maintains excitement and helps the man keep a strong erection.

21. Suspended congress

'When a man supports himself against a wall,' wrote Vatsyayana, 'and the woman, sitting on his hands joined together and held underneath her, throws her arms round his neck, and putting her thighs alongside his waist, moves herself by her feet, which are touching the wall against which the man is leaning, it is called the suspended congress.'

Have a go

This is the position that made the *Kama Sutra* famous. And, for once, Vatsyayana's description is completely clear. But how do you actually get started? The easiest thing is for the woman to lay on a bed or some other convenient piece of furniture with her vulva at the edge. The man then penetrates and, with the woman's arms around his neck, lifts her up with his hands under her buttocks. Now he can move over to the wall. It sounds athletic but with a large man and a small woman it isn't. On the other hand, with a small man and a large woman...

One translation suggests the woman should shift her weight from foot to foot against the wall. If you're a really athletic couple the woman can spread her legs out *along* the wall.

The beasts and birds

Surprisingly, aside from the 'congress of a cow', Vatsyayana doesn't describe any other rear-entry positions in detail, other than to recommend his readers to imitate 'the different kinds of beasts and birds' such as dogs, deer, wild boar, horses and elephants. Because of his mention of elephants, some modern commentators have assumed the so-called 'elephant posture' from the much-later *Ananga Ranga* is one of the postures he had in mind. You'll find it in a lot of books on the Kama Sutra but, in fact, it wasn't a specific position of Vatsyayana's at all. If you want to do it, it requires the woman to lie flat on her front and the man to lie on top, but as the ancient Hindus would have known perfectly well, no elephants ever do that. My theory is that the confusion has arisen because the position is suitable for the *hastini* or 'elephant woman' – a woman whose vagina has become slack due to childbirth. In other words, the position in the *Ananga Ranga* should be considered as the 'elephant woman's posture' not the 'elephant posture'.

Have a go

When the woman is lying completely flat on her front it isn't possible for the man to enter, so she'll have to raise her hips for penetration. Once that's accomplished she can lay down flat again and the man lays on top, taking some

of his weight on his arms. As a refinement, position a vibrator on the bed so it presses against the vulva.

So there are really only 21 specific authentic positions?

That's right. 21. You can choose all or any of them for your photographs. But if you'd like to have a go at emulating 'the beasts and birds' and sending those pictures in you certainly can.