

A STUDY OF FOUR YOGA POSES: CUES, VARIATIONS AND ASSORTED NOTES

As new technologies allow a better understanding anatomy and of how our bodies work, the study of yoga asanas evolves, and so does the cueing for those poses. When reading Iyengar's, Light on Yoga, I am sometimes surprised at how few specific instructions are provided compared to all those provided in yoga class or in a workshop. And sometimes we hear conflicting advice from different sources. To make better sense of all that information, I chose to focus on the cues for four asanas: Tadasana (Mountain Pose), Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose), Ardha Matsyendrasana (Half Lord of the Fishes), and Parivritta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle).

For each of the above, cues for the classic pose are presented first, followed by those for variations of the pose. Of course, for the variations, many of the classic-pose cues also apply. The cues are listed in the approximate order that they would be given to prepare for, move into, and refine the pose. After most of the cues are the first 1-3 initials of the teacher/author's last name. (See list of references.) The lists are not all-inclusive, as they were compiled to highlight variation in cueing. The classic versions of the poses are covered first, and then the variations.

Tadasana requires the use of foot, leg, hip, spine, chest, back, shoulder, neck and abdominal muscles to generate "mountain strength". Centering in a seated or supine position can help to focus the mind before tadasana, although in vinyasa classes mountain pose is often used for centering. Especially for beginning students, staff pose or a supine tadasana with the feet on the wall, or supta 1 is helpful to bring attention to the alignment of the ankle and knee joints before standing in tadasana. Savasana with attention to how the body meets the mat and cat/cow may also be used as prep poses. The pose increases postural awareness, strengthens and tones the whole body and helps to create balance.



Tadasana

Seated Tadasana

Supta Tadasana

Palm Tree Pose

TADASANA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Spread toes wide, balance weight evenly across feet, and press down through them strongly (Cr)	Activates lower leg muscles	Grounding
Lift toes, press 4 corners into earth, anchor base of big toe (Le)	Firm base; lifts arches	
Ground base of big & little toe & the front of the heel (K)	Activates intrinsic foot muscles; lifts the three arches of the foot	
Lift the kneecaps	Activates thigh muscles	
Engage bandhas (Le) (Swe)	Firms core, creates space in the low back	Prana flow, nadis
Balance tension all around the thighs (C)	Extends the knees without locking	
Broaden and lengthen the inner groins; lift pubic bones off thighs (M)	Lifts pelvis away from thighs; stabilizes iliopsoas	
Compress hips, tighten buttocks	Stabilizes pelvis & lumbar spine	
Engage hamstrings & glutes (Cr)	Stabilizes knee from behind	
Pull hips together and keep thighs tight all around (C)	Slightly tightens low abs	
Take tops of thighs back, widen hips, then curl tailbone down (F)	Helps to find neutral pelvis & natural lumbar curve; lengthens spine	
Widen the pelvic diaphragm (M)	Creates space in tight hip joints, balances pelvis	
Lift the perineum (M)	Stabilizes pelvis for those with flexible hip joints	
Ashwini bandh (C) (S)	Stabilizes and lifts pelvis	Briefer cue for hips & pelvic floor
Engage transversus abdominis; muscle above pubic bone moves in and up (Cr)	Stabilizes core	Cr's description: pulling the muscle that wraps around your waist toward the midline, cinching a belt
Move low ab and ab organs up and back, without tensing (S)	Stabilizes core	
Engage rectus abdominis (LV)	Draws ribcage down, stabilizes lumbar spine	
Tuck in waist all around & stretch it up (S)	Creates space between pelvis and ribs	
Keep the natural curves of the spine	Stabilizes core and aligns joints and the 3 diaphragms	
Ease the front ribs back toward the spine (Le)	Aligns ribcage over pelvis	
Shoulder blades vertical against ribcage, not forward or back (M)	Aligns ribcage over pelvis	

TADASANA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
“Widen the shoulders and create space across the front and back of the body” (Le)	Balances upper chest and aids circumferential breath	Breath
Inner edges of shoulder blades lift away from kidneys; top edges move away from spine; bottom tips toward spine (circular pattern) (M)	Helps to maintain even contact against ribcage; prevents forward rib thrust	Circular direction reverses when arms are raised
Relax shoulders, allow collarbones to widen away from sternal notch; widen midsternum (M)	Opens and lifts chest	“midsternum” (sim. to “heart center”) is used to avoid forward rib thrust common with “lift sternum”
Engage lower third of trapezius, activate triceps (LV)	Draws shoulder blades down, away from ears; straightens elbows	
Arms active, fingers together (Le)	Energizes	Kapha balance, sthira
After turning upper arms out, stretch arms long and let them hang naturally (S)	Calming	Vata balance, sukha,
Lift inner triceps, inner elbow to outer armpit; lengthen outer triceps from shoulders to outer elbow; lengthen from outer elbow to inner wrists (M)	Rolls humerus out, forearm in; stabilizes elbow joint; allows shoulders to open	Arm balance practice
Extend neck from below shoulder blades (S)	Lengthens cervical spine keeping natural curve without tensing throat and neck	
Lift back of skull away from neck, chin level (S)	Keeps head light	

SEATED TADASANA (L)

CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
		Restorative, posture, breath, meditation
Feet flat on floor or resting on a support	Enables relaxation	Optimum hip/thigh angle is about 120°
Use armrests or a pillow on lap to rest arms	Allows shoulders, head and neck to relax	
Maintain anterior pelvic tilt; maybe use towel under sit bones	Lifts spine	
Normal, outward thoracic curve	Frees ribcage, breath	
“ribs hanging from the shoulders”	Creates sense of ease	

SUPTA TADASANA (F)

CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
		Flat stomach, natural curves of spine, axial extension
Eyes look straight up	Maintains natural cervical curve	
Join inner edges of feet; middle of heel is on the floor; toes point up towards ceiling	Aligns legs	
Spread toes & balls of the feet; keep soles flat [& press into wall]	Activates foot and leg muscles	
Stretch legs out of the waist	Lengthens low back	
Broaden buttocks & lengthen them towards heels; press thighs into floor	Creates space in lumbar spine	
Inner spiral upper thighs (J)	Broadens low back	
Anchor sides of waist towards the floor, but keep lumbar curve	Stabilizes hips	
Lengthen sides of ribcage toward the head, away from the waist	Lengthens spine	
Roll shoulders down to the floor & tuck the shoulder blades into the back	Opens chest	
Lift arms towards ceiling; arms parallel & hands facing each other & directly above shoulders		
Firm arms as if squeezing a beach ball; plug upper arms into socket (J)	Stabilizes shoulder girdle	
Keep back ribs broad & grounded as you bring the arms into an overhead position.	Prevents rib thrust	
Engage abs while taking arms overhead. (J)	Prevents rib thrust	
Stretch heels away from wrists; wrists away from the heels	Full body stretch	

PALM TREE POSE (SWA)




CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
		Energizing, Kapha balance
With arms overhead, interlace fingers and turn palms up	Hand and wrist stretch	Chakra 1
Rest hands on head and fix eyes on spot slightly above head level		
Inhale and stretch arms, shoulders and chest up; add toe rise	Full body stretch; encourages diaphragmatic breathing	
Hold, then lower heels and hands (to head) on exhale; rest		Chakra 6 if good balance
Repeat 10X		

*In Swami Satyananda Saraswati's book (SWA), *tadasana urdhva hastasana* with toe rise is called "palm tree pose", and it is his cues I've summarized above. Variations he suggests: 1) look up to the hands, and 2) lift a leg and extend it either forward or back. Benefits he mentions are: 1) helps to increase height, 2) clears of congestion of spinal nerves, 3) stretches *rectus abdomini* and intestines and 4) keeps abs and nerves toned during the first six months of pregnancy.

Coulter notes that the pose (without the toe rise) can be used to teach the proximal-distal connection. By selectively relaxing tension through the body, the effects can be felt all the way down to pelvis (C).

Bhujangasana is a prone backbending pose that opens the hip flexors, abs and chest. The deep back muscles and splenius muscles in the back of the neck and head do most of the lifting, and the glutes and leg muscles work as stabilizers of the pelvis. The rhomboids, serratus anterior and pectoralis stabilize the shoulder blades and lift the ribcage. Appropriate prep poses are cat/cow, shoulder openers, and lunges or baby dancer to stretch the iliopsoas muscles.

Cobra pose improves circulation to the spine, and strengthens it and can relieve back pain. In the front torso it massages the digestive and reproductive organs, and in the back, the kidneys and adrenals. The chest expansion stimulates the thymus gland, boosting the immune system.

	
Cobra	Cobra—arms at sides
	https://search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?p=doug+keller+cobra&ei=UTF-8&hspart=mozilla&hsimp=yhs-002
Relaxed Cobra hand position	Link to Doug Keller’s Wide-Cobra video

COBRA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Use deeper intrinsic back muscles rather than superficial ones (K)	Allows rib movement; easier breathing	Latissimus dorsi create flexion in upper back and internally rotate the humerus
Enter on exhalation (K)	Esp. for belly breathers, allows thoracic extension	Breath
Lengthen one leg at a time & take tailbone toward heels (F)	Lengthens low back	
Press tops of feet into mat and drag away from midline (LB)	Activates TFL, int. rotation; counters ext. rot. effect of glutes	
Hands by the side of the pelvic region (I)		
Hands to side of chest, fingers turned out a bit (F) Hands beside chest, fingertips at nipple level (C)	Accommodates tighter shoulders? longer arms?; lift relies less on arms	More advanced? I find hands farther back to be more comfortable, but maybe it's because of my tight shoulders and longer arms.
Hands under shoulders (Le)		
Relax shoulders away from ears and draw shoulder blades down back (Le)	Opens chest	
Engage bandhas (Le)	Helps to prevent arching in the lower back	
Press pubic bone into floor (Le)		Chakra 2
Draw front ribs in and down before entering backbends & maintain in the pose (R)	Prevents rib thrust; helps to evenly distribute curve of/load to spine	
Draw buttocks toward backs of thighs (Le) Lengthen inner legs away from navel, kidneys (M)	Lengthens low back	
Hold heels and toes together (C)	Creates moderate tension in legs	
Activate serratus anterior (K)	Helps to maintain neutral position of scapulae	
With only the shoulders lifted, lengthen forward; expand whole torso from the inside (F)	Prevents compression in low back	
Lengthen forward while lifting (Le) Lengthen xiphoid process away from navel (M)	Prevents compression in low back	

COBRA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Keep a slight cat back while coming up (TT)	Keeps broadness across back	
Contract anus & buttocks; tighten the thighs (I)		
Move collarbones away from sternal notch (M)	Opens chest	
Draw top edges of shoulder blades away from ribs & bottom tips toward ribcage (M)	Corrects rounded shoulders	
Draw eyes of chest deeper (M)	Releases tension in shoulder girdle	“eyes”= depressions on either side of manubrium, beneath the midpoints of the collarbones

Note: The “M” and “LB” cues are from Moyer’s and Long’s descriptions of Upward Facing Dog rather than cobra.

COBRA VARIATION: ARMS AT SIDES (Mc, L)

COBRA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
		Back pain, shoulders, posture
Arms extend back, palms facing thighs	Helps move shoulders away from ears	
Legs at least hip width apart & knees turned inward	Broadens low back	
Lift hands and upper body into a slight, backward arch on an exhale	Strengthens low back; mobilizes mid-back	

RELAXED COBRA VARIATION: MILD TRACTION IN THE BACK (C)

RELAXED COBRA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
		Back pain, abdominal breathing
Hands on top of each other under forehead, elbows out to sides OR make a diamond shape with the thumbs and index fingers, tips of thumbs under the chin	Positioned to create traction in the back	Arm position internally rotates shoulders; it may be easier for those with tight shoulders, but not corrective. Focus is on the back.
Keeping elbows, forearms, and hands planted, lift head & press through arms to create isometric pull	Mid- and low-back, legs, hips, thighs all stay relaxed and protected; feel traction in low back	Usually the cue is to firm leg and hip muscles to protect the back. Here the stretch in the back is felt without all the tension.
Notice breathing	With the chest immobilized, lower back lifts with inhalation and drops with exhalation	Breath

WIDE COBRA VARIATION (Ke)

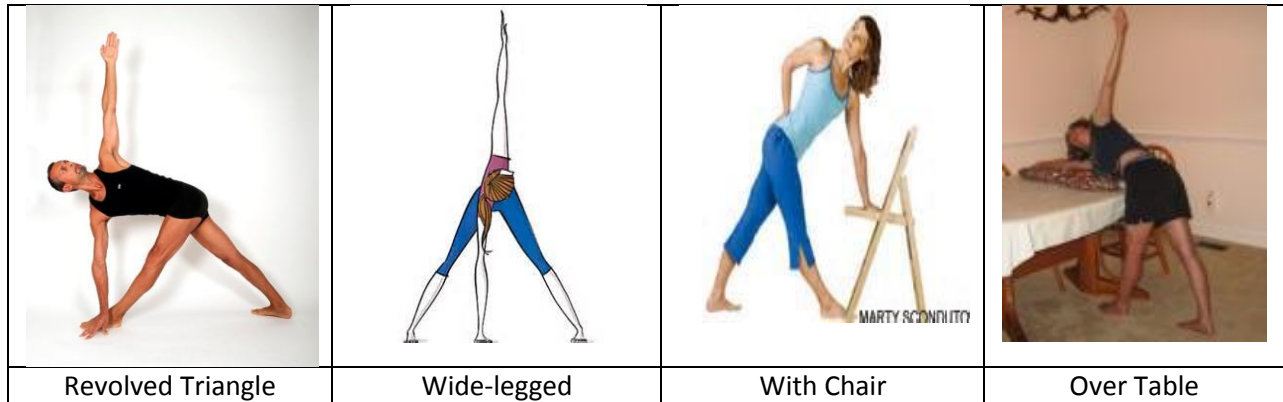
WIDE COBRA CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
		Jalandhara bandha (JB), back pain
Hands wide, in line with shoulders, on fingertips; elbows toward ceiling, upper arms in line with shoulders; head bowed	Protects neck and reduces pinch in lumbar spine	
Keeping head down, squeeze shoulder blades as you lift shoulders toward ceiling; keep softness beneath the collarbones; continue with chest lift	Protects neck and reduces pinch in lumbar spine	Usually the cue is to firm leg and hip muscles to protect the back. Here the stretch in the back is felt without all the tension.
While lifting take top of throat back and up as head lifts to look forward; “treating your head as the last vertebra on the spine”	JB eases breathing in the pose and reduces the tendency to lead with the chin	While breathing with the neck well aligned, the scalenes are free to lift the first rib, expanding the upper chest.

Revolved Triangle and Half Lord of the Fishes are both to be avoided to protect spinal integrity according to yoga critic Michaelle Edwards (E). While she makes some good points regarding the use of props and alignment during twists, one cannot deny the benefits of the deeper twists. They increase flexibility of the spine and tone the spinal nerves; help to prevent spinal inflammation and calcium deposits; relieve low back pain; open the chest; massage the abdominal and reproductive organs and aid in digestion; help regulate secretions of the liver, pancreas and adrenal glands; relieve tension after forward- and back-bending and they relieve stiffness in the outer hips.

Although several sources note that the twists can help slipped discs, they are not generally recommended by PTs or chiropractors. Roger Cole, a famous Iyengar teacher, provides a succinct explanation of disc problems and writes: “Although not so prolonged, seated twists can also be hard on the disks because they combine the effects of upright sitting with the effects of twisting. Rounding the lower back in twists makes them much worse.” (Co) And Dr. Carla Cupido writes that low back flexion combined with twisting can increase the risk of disc herniation. She advises: “In yoga be mindful of your lumbar curve and your end range.” “Avoid flexion with rotation in daily life.” (Cu)

As a standing pose, **Parivritta Trikonasana**, provides the additional benefits of toning the foot, ankle and leg muscles, developing stamina and improving balance. The glutes, quads, psoas, erector spinae and triceps, posterior deltoid and rhomboids work, and the hamstrings, gastrocnemius, soleus, obliques and pectorals are stretched. (The involvement of those muscles varies depending on which leg is forward.) These are some prep suggestions: Reclined twists, janu sirsasana twist, triangle, and parsvottanasana,

followed by a spine-neutralizing forward bend. I've found that adding shoulder openers makes the thoracic spinal rotation much easier.



REVOLVED TRIANGLE CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Come onto back toes, then replant	Helps to square hips	
Press into the base of front big toe & outer edge of back foot (Sh)	Helps balance and to keep front hip aligned/forward	
Suck in belly before twisting (Mac)		
Lift kneecaps all the way into the pelvic floor (Mac)		
Move bottom kidney, ribs and shoulder blade into the body (S)	Rotates torso	
Lengthen in a spiraling motion, sacrum to head (Swe)		
Bring back (bottom) arm forward as much as possible before it crosses midline and torso lowers/twists (Le)	Helps to square hips & lengthen spine. Caution: Beginners may take humerus away from shoulder socket with this cue.	Rather than "arm", it may be better to say bring your "shoulder blade" forward so that the whole torso comes along while moving into the twist.
Twist while moving down—not after (Sh)		
Revolve hips, waist and chest (S)		
Extend trunk toward head; abdomen both revolves and moves toward chest (I)	Lengthens spine while twisting	
Turn back thigh and hip joint inward (I)	Helps to revolve spine; hips also turn	X1—back hip slightly lower than front hip—rotation greater and starts lower in spine—wider stance

REVOLVED TRIANGLE CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Take back hip back and up; front hip forward and down (B)	Helps keep hips level and stable	X2—hips level—lesser rotation that starts around T12—shorter stance
Scissor hips & turn both legs gently inward (Le)	Stabilizes pelvis, improves balance	X2
Stretch back hip away from back thigh (S)	Turns hip	X1
After turning hips to the max, compress hips (S)	Stabilizes for spinal extension	X1
Move front shinbone forward, back shinbone back (Sh)	Ensures knees are stable	
Soften eyes of chest (M)	Increases rotation of upper spine; eases gripping in top-side lower back	
Collarbones are soft & broad as you lengthen through inner arms (M)	Opens chest	
Aim for spine parallel to floor; arm, front leg & torso form a right triangle (B)	Helps to avoid lateral flexion of the spine	
Lift ribcage away from bottom back armpit; lengthen top outer armpit (M)	Deepens rotation	
Inner corner of top shoulder blade moves away from back of head (M)	Releases neck	

In the table above X1 and X2 are, to me, significant differences. For X1 the twist begins lower in the spine and the back-leg hip is allowed to lower a little. For X2 the hips are “tea cup” level, and the twist then can occur only from the thoracic spine up. With the X1 version, I feel more rotation and can almost get my top arm up to vertical, or 90°. With X2, I strain to get it beyond 45°. I think it’s my quadratus lumborum muscles that crave the stretch that X1 allows, and shun the effort that X2 requires. Yet almost all the images of revolved triangle are X2, the right way apparently, according to GAYP (generally accepted yoga principles). Maybe I just need to stretch my QLs a whole lot more.

WIDE-LEGGED REVOLVED TRIANGLE (Mc)

In his discussion of yoga for chronic fatigue syndrome in McCall's book, this is one of the poses Gary Kraftsow recommends. Following uttanasana, it is the only other standing pose in "The P.M. Practice". With the legs wide and toes forward, the core and leg muscles work less to balance than in the classic pose.

- Stand with feet forward, 2-3 feet apart, arms stretched out to sides at shoulder level
- While exhaling, revolve torso and put the right palm on the floor or a block, fingers pointing left, and extend the left arm up; head stays in line with spine, gaze is toward the floor
- Inhaling, stretch the left arm alongside head and turn head to gaze up
- Exhaling, take the arm back up and look down
- Inhale back to standing with outstretched arms

Those with balance problems or weak legs and core can still get the benefits of moderate stretching and twisting; or mild effects, if taking the bottom hand to a chair seat.

REVOLVED TRIANGLE WITH A CHAIR (Sp)

This variation opens the chest and strengthens the upper back. It counters the effects of forward-head posture and kyphosis.

- Place front foot under chair and turn back foot in about 60°; feet are about 3 feet apart.
- Activate legs and lengthen torso up
- Exhaling, turn torso toward front-leg side & place bottom arm on chair seat and top hand on lower back
- Release tension in upper body and hold the pose, or come in and out of it

REVOLVED TRIANGLE STRETCHING OVER TABLE


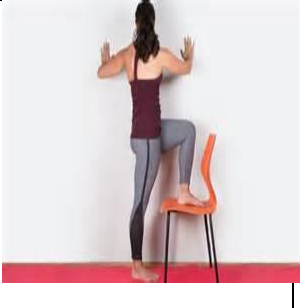


In this variation one can feel the stretch on the bottom side of the torso while in the twist, and feel the "parallel to the floor" torso. If the table is narrow enough, the bottom arm can be lowered as in the classic pose. (I made this up; maybe someone has a better version.)

- Stand with hip creases against edge of pub-height table, or add bolster/blankets.
- Inhaling, raise bottom arm overhead
- Exhaling, lower while twisting to front-leg side; bottom arm stretches along table; ear rests on upper arm
- Top arm can stay on lower back or extend toward ceiling
- Bottom hand grabs the table edge if possible, for extra traction

In **Ardha Matsyendrasana** the hamstrings of the bottom leg flex the knee, and gluteus maximus and deep external rotators turn the thigh out, and the adductors and internal rotators of the top leg are working. Contraction of the top-leg psoas increases hip flexion. The obliques and external rotators of the arm also work. The chest and outer hip muscles are stretched. These are some prep poses: reclined twist, down dog, wide-legged forward fold & twist, revolved triangle and pigeon.

The deep twist massages the abdominal and pelvic organs and stimulates lymph flow. It opens the chest and stretches the back. Compared to standing or supine twists, seated twists allow us to deeply stretch the outer hip muscles without being restricted by tight hamstrings or adductors.

Kaminoff explains that with a langhana focus and belly breathing in the pose, tension in the pelvic/ab area is released allowing the experience of apana; or, with the abs engaged and a brahmana chest breath, the thoracic spine can rotate more and an upward prana flow experienced with ab contraction on the exhalation.

			
Ardha Matsyendrasana	Standing Twist	Ardha Matsyendrasana Chair variation	Ardha Matsyendrasana One leg extended

ARDHA MATSY CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Elevate buttocks on blanket or pillow (C)	Helps to maintain inward, lumbar curve	
Root through both pelvic bones (F)	Stabilizes pelvis	
Lift pelvic floor, take belly in (Mac)	Helps to extend spine	
Engage bandhas (Le)	Stabilizes pelvis and low back	
Align knees with pubic bone and sternum (Mac)		
Before twisting, inhale and contract pelvic floor; exhale and relax it (M)	Awareness of muscle involvement & that twist starts there	

ARDHA MATSY CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Internally rotate thigh of top leg by pressing top-leg ankle into outer thigh(LB)	Eccentrically contracts the stretching abductors	
Twist without using arms for leverage (K)	Find maximal safe action in the spine	Arms should not mobilize; they help deepen and stabilize
Use ab muscles to help twist (F)	Helps to lengthen	
After turning spine to max, keep turning inner body (F)	Deepens twist	
Sit bones positioned squarely on mat & shoulders parallel to floor (Mac)	Help to lengthen spine and keep the twist vertical with back and neck straight	
Breathe more into chest if bandhas engaged OR belly breathing if chest feels compressed (K)	Creates sense ease	Sukha

The image included above is not the full ardha matsy pose. When the arms bind, the twist is intensified and the stretch and massage are deeper. Especially with beginning students who choose to attempt binding, the reminder to be mindful of one's end range should be offered.

STANDING TWIST (Ke)

The standing twist is less intense than ardha matsy. The hips and knees flex to a lesser degree and the spine rotates less. It is easier to keep the back straight than in a seated twist, and easier to notice alignment than in a reclined twist. This would fit with a "desk jockey" theme or an SI joint focus.

STANDING TWIST CUE	EFFECT	THEME/FOCUS/NOTES
Lift knee of wall leg & place foot on seat of chair; knee is bent 90°	Flexing the hip stabilizes it	
Place wall hand on the wall and steady the supporting leg	Stabilizes the base	
Rise onto toes, turn to face wall	Makes it easier to enter the twist	
Exhale while lowering the heel to the floor; allow right hip to descend; hold the twist		

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA—Chair variation

The chair variation requires less work by the stabilizing muscles than the standing twist and, with less flexion in the hip, the effects of the twist are milder. It is a good twist for those with physical limitations that prevent deeper twisting and for those who need a quick release after prolonged sitting, standing or bending.

- Sit toward the front edge of the chair with sit bones evenly anchored and feet firmly grounded
- Inhale taking the arms over head, lengthening the spine
- Exhale as you twist to the right and lower the right arm to the back of the seat and the left arm to the outside of the right knee; look to the right.
- Slowly turn the head to check that the left shoulder is not rounding, correct, and then gaze back to the right.
- Lengthen the spine with each inhale, and twist a bit more on the exhale.
- To release, on an inhale stretch the arms out and up as you unwind to face forward, and then exhale the arms down.

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA—One leg extended

Although this is considered an easier variation of the pose, with the legs extended there is a greater tendency of the lumbar spine to round. It may be appropriate, however, for those with larger thighs or bellies, and for those with certain knee or hip problems. If adding height with blankets does not feel comfortable and the lumbar spine still rounds, the standing twist and chair version are alternatives.

- Sit with legs extended, hands behind for support. (Try to sit keeping the natural curves of the spine. If there is any outward curve of the lumbar spine, sit on a blanket to restore the inward lumbar curve.)
- Bend the left knee and cross the left foot to the outside of the right shin, knee or thigh.
- Engage the left inner thigh muscles and press the left toe mound into the floor; left knee points toward the ceiling. The extended leg remains active—toes up and upper thigh pressing into the floor.
- If the left knee drops out to the left side, move the foot to the inside of the right knee.
- Clasp the hands around the knee and sit tall.
- Still holding the knee with the right hand, inhale the left arm up and lower it to the floor or block behind while twisting to the left.

- Evenly rooting the sit bones, lengthen the spine up on the inhale, and maybe twist a bit more on the exhale.
- To deepen the twist the knee can be held in the crook of the elbow, or the outer triceps can push into the outer knee, as long as the chest remains open. If the shoulders round, go back to the less intense position.
- To release, inhale the right arm up while unwinding, exhale it to the floor behind, and extend the legs.
- Leaning back on the hands, windshield wiper the legs before switching to the other side.

After studying the four poses and variations of them, the “honor your body” message has been engrained in my mind and in my practice. We heard a lot of “it depends” during our teacher training, and when yoga is described as a science, it should be interpreted as a science for an individual—not one science for all. Pat Pao uses “maybe” or “see about” a lot and I’ve adopted that habit in my cueing, too. Reminding students that a cue that is appropriate for one student may not work for another is important.

It was interesting reading the different presentations of the poses, and one of the reasons this paper took me so long to complete is that I kept reading more and more, beyond what was required for this. Donald Moyer’s inner body focus is clearly for the intermediate or advanced student. It would blend well with energy medicine for a workshop. Besides the anatomy details, Kaminoff’s book offers many helpful explanations of common problems students have and references to energy flow. Doug Keller’s yoga therapy books are difficult to close; there is so much practical information in them and so many ayurvedic principles I have yet to learn. McCall’s and Fishman’s books are also practical in a simpler way. And Coulter’s is fascinating!

I still need to work on creating themes for each class. Mine are usually very broad (energizing, calming, meditative), anatomical, or problem-focused. The IYT Teacher’s toolbox is nice in that for each pose it includes an awareness message for each chakra. Someday I hope to understand yoga philosophy well enough to weave it into my practice and classes as well as so many accomplished teachers.

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