

TWISTING : PART TWO



Twists unlock tension and increase range of motion. But when done incorrectly—especially turning too far too soon—twists can wreak havoc on your shoulder and pelvic girdles. To twist safely, you need to understand the mechanics of the pose and the areas of resistance in your own body. And it is essential that you use your breath to guide you slowly in and out of any twist.

Unless you have a spinal cord injury that prevents any degree of safe twisting, you should consider including twists in your personal yoga practice on a regular basis. This is especially true for athletes whose performance is tied to their power and range of motion across the transverse plane (e.g., those who swing a golf club, tennis racquet or bat). And football, hockey, basketball and soccer players who practice twists can benefit from the ability to make quick lateral movements and turns with a decreased risk of injury.

The twists in this section are more advanced than those in Part One, so master the previous poses before incorporating these into your practice. In addition to deeper twists, these poses share an emphasis on shoulder opening. Listen to your body. Never force yourself deeper into a pose just for the sake of accomplishing it. Twists should evolve naturally through practice.

EAGLE CRUNCHES

Inhale as you extend your arms out to your sides and draw your bent legs off the floor, shins parallel with the earth. Exhale as you cross your right arm under your left, bending at your elbows to wind your right arm around your left. If your palms don't touch, squeeze your arms in place wherever they are making contact. Now sweep your right leg over your left and, if possible, hook your right foot around your left calf. Otherwise, simply find a good place to press your foot into your leg and anchor it there.



Exhale and contract your abdominal muscles to crunch, leading your elbows and knees together. Inhale to extend your finger tips and heels in opposite directions, feeling the corresponding stretch in your shoulders and legs. Repeat through ten breaths. Then switch to the other side. Remember that your arms and legs should be opposite (i.e., left leg on top and left arm underneath).



HIPS/GROINS : PART ONE



Chances are that you know someone who has had hip replacement surgery. With the prevalence of hip injuries and advancements in medical science, this type of surgery is more popular than ever. Why are so many people having their hips replaced?

Think about your hip joint. As a ball and socket joint, it can move in a number of directions. Now think about your daily range of motion through your hips. Unless you have an extremely physical lifestyle or already regularly practice yoga hip-opening poses, your hips probably don't ever move through their full range of motion. After years of underuse, they naturally lose the capacity to move to their former full extent. All it takes is a fall or movement that forces the hip in an unfamiliar direction and injury is inevitable.

Yoga conditioning offers ample opportunities to work the hips through all degrees of their range of motion to restore and increase hip flexibility. The postures in this series do just that. Pigeon is one of the deepest hip-opening poses in yoga. And frog and dead bug each affect different angles of the hip joints and supporting musculature, especially the groins.