

The Power Of A

Twist

Asanas that twist the torso are vital to complete any yoga practice. They complement all forward and back-bending postures and provide a long list of physical, emotional and energetic benefits.

These asanas are frequently used to assist and enhance detox programmes as they have a cleansing effect on the entire body. This is because the postures quite literally squeeze some of the major organs involved in digestion and help to move waste material through the digestive system, enhancing the elimination process. They also help to remove toxins and assist the lymphatic system (which relies purely on muscular contractions to move the lymph fluid around the body). This positive effect of cleansing the internal organs means that once the toxins are removed, fresh oxygen and nutrients can enter the system.

Twisting postures will increase the range of movement and release tension in the spine, shoulders, neck and pelvis. They help to lengthen and strengthen the core muscles and maintain a healthy back. It is these postures that will stretch and lengthen the intercostal muscles, which allow the ribcage to expand during breathing. The more the ribs can expand, the more efficient our breathing technique will become. Oxygen levels will increase, and more positive results will be enjoyed from pranayamas.

In addition to all of the physical benefits, twisting also provides many positive energetic benefits, which increase vitality and help balance emotions. For example, when we perform a simple seated twist and focus on drawing up the lower abdominals and engaging moola bandha (the root-lock or pelvic floor muscles), every one of the seven main chakras between the base of the spine and the crown of the head is stimulated. Prior to rotating

the torso, activate moola bandha and lengthen the spine. This stimulates the root chakra (by engaging the lower abdominals) and the abdominal chakra, while the rotation of the torso stimulates the solar plexus and the heart chakras; turning the head to look over the shoulder will stimulate the throat chakra, relaxing the brow will open the third eye or brow chakra, and lengthening out of the crown of the head allows the crown chakra to resonate freely. Aligning the body and creating this straight line with the spine whilst twisting the torso will help move pranic energy between the chakras and encourage the prana to travel in sushumna nadi. (There are three main energy zones for prana to travel in following the line of the spine. To advance spiritually the energy is required to move up the body in the centre nadi, sushumna).

It is also believed that performing twisting postures provides greater insight and clearer vision by allowing us to see perspectives.

Before a Twist

The spine is made up of 33 vertebrae: seven cervical (neck), twelve thoracic (mid-back) and five lumbar (lower back). It helps to support and move the body and provides protection for the spinal column. It is very important that the spine is aligned correctly prior to performing any twisting posture. In between each vertebra is an intervertebral disc, which provides cushioning and protection for the spine and assists all movements. Before twisting it is important to lengthen the spine and to picture the discs as cushions: this will ensure that they do not become squashed as the torso rotates. If this happens it is possible that they could perforate or the vertebrae could grind against each other as the twist is performed. So consider your posture before you rotate the torso in any twisting asana.

NB. If you are pregnant avoid all twisting asanas, even open twists. It is important to protect the growing baby and maintain a healthy back during pregnancy. The hormone relaxin will soften the ligaments in preparation for childbirth so the body should not be overstretched or rotated as injuries can occur; and recovering from pelvic pain or lower-back pain post-delivery would not be easy. It is also important to remember that we can never be 100% sure of babies positioning as they do move regularly. It is just not necessary for any risks to be taken during these magical months.

If you suffer from any back or spinal disorders seek medical advice first before performing twisting asanas.

Pariivrtta Sukhasana (Seated Spinal Twist)

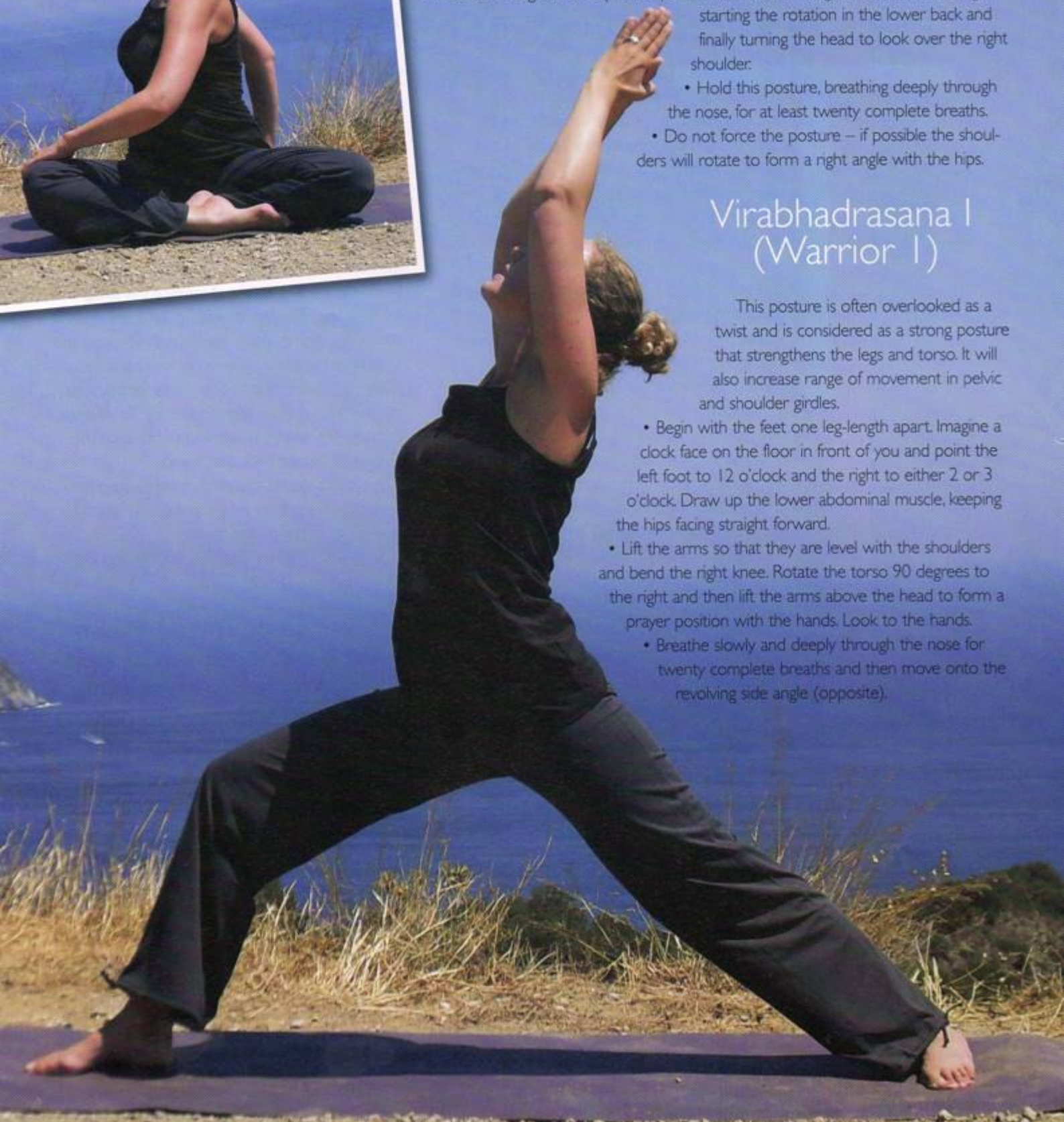
This is a gentle twist that allows you to focus on your alignment and posture. It will help to balance the chakras, increase flexibility and remove tension in the spine and neck.

- Begin sitting with the ankles crossed, place the left hand to the outside of the right leg and the right hand to the floor behind you.
- Inhale and lengthen the spine, as you exhale rotate through the torso to the right, starting the rotation in the lower back and finally turning the head to look over the right shoulder.
 - Hold this posture, breathing deeply through the nose, for at least twenty complete breaths.
 - Do not force the posture – if possible the shoulders will rotate to form a right angle with the hips.

Virabhadrasana I (Warrior I)

This posture is often overlooked as a twist and is considered as a strong posture that strengthens the legs and torso. It will also increase range of movement in pelvic and shoulder girdles.

- Begin with the feet one leg-length apart. Imagine a clock face on the floor in front of you and point the left foot to 12 o'clock and the right to either 2 or 3 o'clock. Draw up the lower abdominal muscle, keeping the hips facing straight forward.
- Lift the arms so that they are level with the shoulders and bend the right knee. Rotate the torso 90 degrees to the right and then lift the arms above the head to form a prayer position with the hands. Look to the hands.
- Breathe slowly and deeply through the nose for twenty complete breaths and then move onto the revolving side angle (opposite).



Parivrtta Parsvakonasana (Revolving Side Angle)

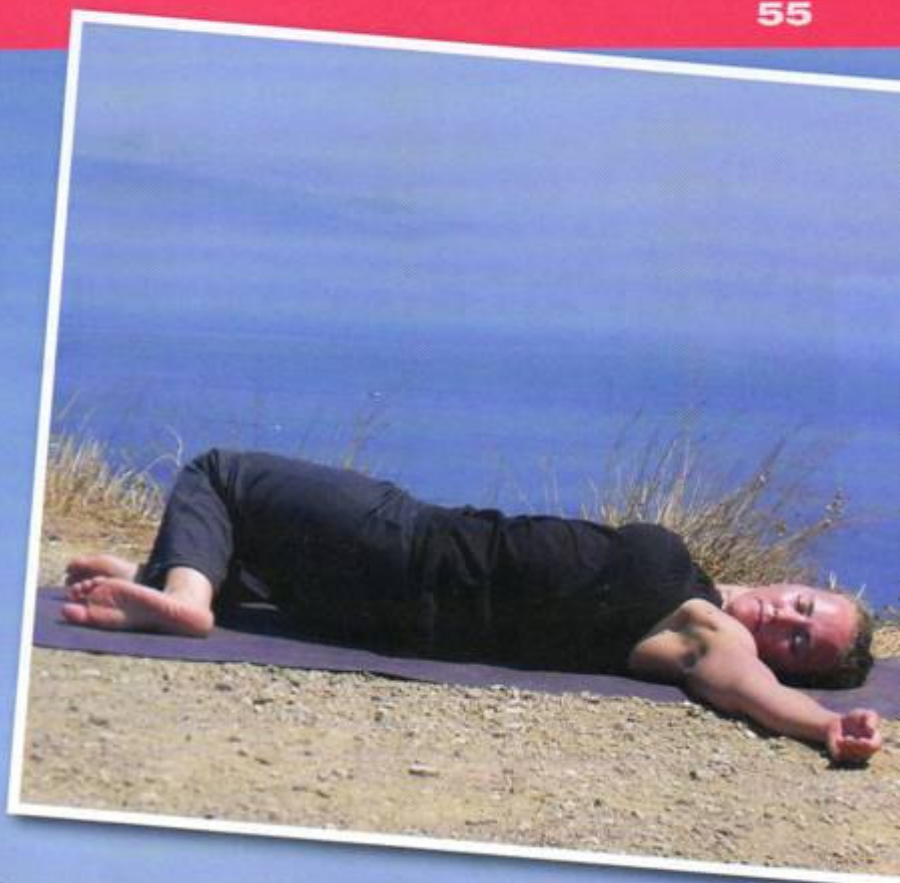
This posture will really squeeze the digestive organs and enhance elimination.

- From warrior I bring the hands in front of the chest, rotate the torso further to the right and position the outside of the left elbow to the outside of the right thigh.
- Keep the hands in a prayer position and look over the right shoulder. Breathe slowly and deeply for twenty complete breaths and repeat on the other side (starting again with warrior I).

Jathara Parivartanasana (Lying Down Twist)

This posture has a lovely balancing effect and will help to align the spine and gently release tension from the shoulders, spine and pelvis.

- Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent and your arms out to the side level with your shoulders.
- Inhale, and as you exhale allow the knees to fall to the right and turn your head to the left. As you inhale return to your starting position.
- When you next exhale allow the knees to fall to the left and turn your head to the right. Continue like this for twenty complete breaths.



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