

Healing the Lower Back - Principles & Practices

Back Arches or Forward Bends – Which One Feels Better?

Does extension (back arches) or flexion (forward bends) hurt? My teacher DV Sridhar teaches to start where the student gets relief and move towards the opposite movement of the spine.

For **Bulging Discs**, do back bends or forward bends relieve the pain. Usually, we find "flexion intolerant discs" (most common) where we can't fold forward, so we find relief with back arches. But sometimes, we have "extension intolerant discs" (less common) where we can't do back bends comfortably, but find relief from bending forward. When acute, avoid rotated twists but lateral bends can be fine. For **Spinal Stenosis**, use forward bends. For **Retrolisthesis**, vertebrae budge back, use back bends to move them forward. For **Anterolisthesis**, vertebrae budge forward, so forward bends move them back. Lateral bends also are good for all these conditions.

Strengthen your Core/Lower Back Muscles

Also, is the core weak? Weak abdominal muscles (mula and uddiyana bandha-s) as well as weak lower back muscles often lead to gripping by the gluts/psoas (hip muscles) to stabilize the pelvis.

Aligning & Relaxing your Hips

Is one hip gripping/tighter than the other? Is one weaker than the other? This also needs to be assessed, and imbalances need to be addressed. Are the hips aligned? Is one higher or rotated forward? Is the back swaying back (lordosis) or is the tail tucked under? Alignment is also key.

Hamstrings – Relax or Strengthen?

How tight are the hamstrings? They can pull the back out of alignment too, leading to the tail being tucked under when they are too tight or lordosis (sway back) when they are loose & weak.

Balancing Sides of the Body

Is one side of the back tighter/weaker than the other? Especially with scoliosis, this alignment issue needs to be addressed. Lateral bends on the tight side can really help. On the other side, we have to focus on extra strengthening. De-rotating the spine can also be crucial when that is a factor. With Lower Back Facet Joints, they get hooked on top of each other or muscles connecting facets get tight. Open one side & Close the other side in lateral poses.

Relaxing Muscle Spasms

Is there muscle spasming/gripping of all the surrounding muscles of the lower back? Do we need to work on traction of the lower back/de-compression? Do we need to contract one muscle to relax the opposite? Or do we just need to rest with bent knees resting on a bolster while we belly breathe with a prolonged exhale, relaxing the lower back and nervous system? Sometimes the best thing to do is just relax on the floor and do gentle breathing with arm movement. Just lying in bed is not considered the best approach anymore.

Relaxing the Mind & Emotions

Finally, what is going on emotionally? There is often comorbidity between pain in the lower or upper back/neck/shoulders and emotional pain/trauma. Sometimes counselling is the key therapy along with svādhyāya (self reflection/contemplation) of principles within Yogic Philosophy. Prāṇāyāma (breathing exercises) and Meditation are also wonderful tools for healing our emotions, calming our nervous system and centering in our changeless Observer/Inner Knower/Self.

General Practices & Principles

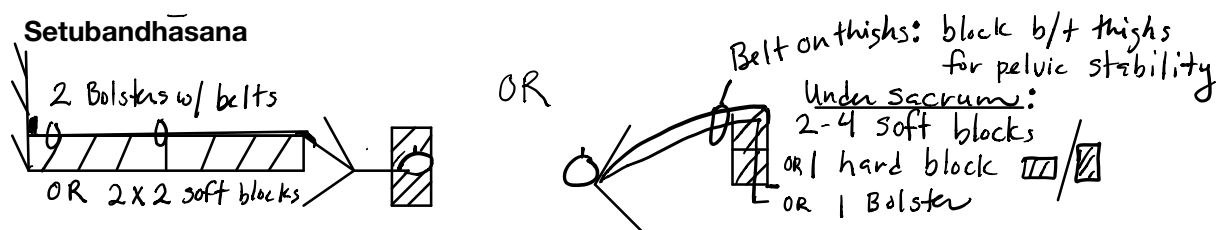
- Back Arches (Purvātana) to Strengthen Lower Back - Try Ardha Poses for One Side at a Time

- Side Bends (Parsva) to Stretch Asymmetries/Scoliosis (QL & Lats); To Open/Close Lumbar Facet Joints; for Muscle Spasms, to tighten the opposite muscles from where spasm, to relax it
- Lower Body Twists (Parivrtti) to Work with Hips, Piriformis, Psoas
- Hips Openers (See Healing Hips): Piriformis, Psoas
- Hips Strengtheners (See Healing Hips): Pelvic Stability
- Hamstrings: Tight or Lax Hamstrings affect the Pelvic Rotation - Pelvis Tucked or Sway Back
- Core Strengthening: Try Urdhva Prasrita Padasana- Lower Abs/Pelvic Floor
- Decompress Spine or Relax Muscle Spasm with Pascimatana Poses (Uttanasana/Happy Baby) & Traction poses
- Decrease Stress & Increase Stability/Confidence

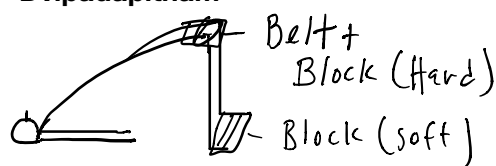
Conditions

A. Bulging Discs: Usually, we find "flexion intolerant discs" (most common) where we can't fold forward, so we find relief with back arches.

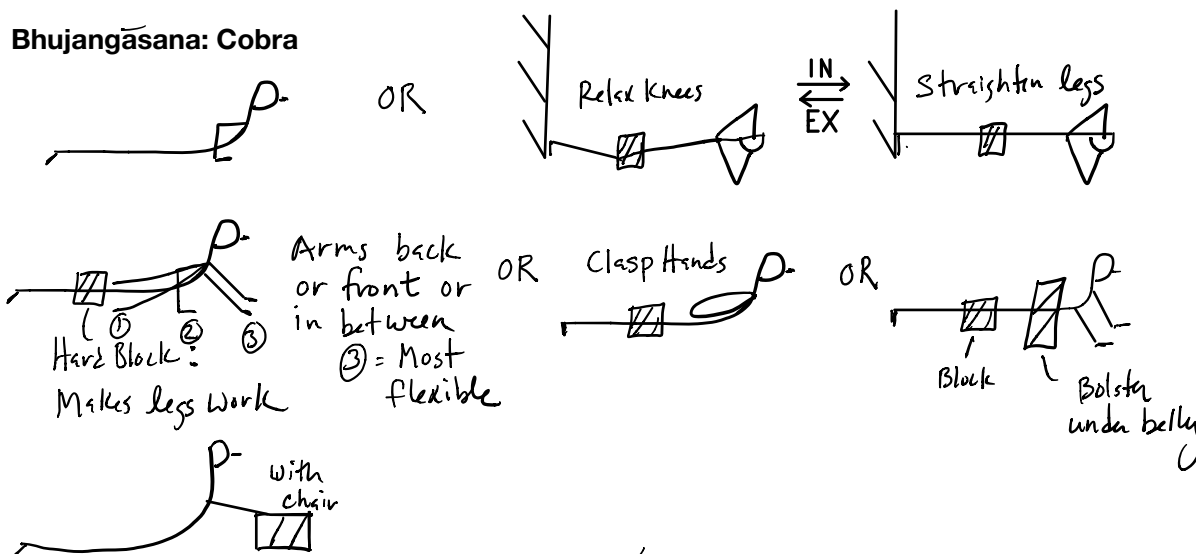
Setubandhasana



Dvipadapitham



Bhujangāsana: Cobra

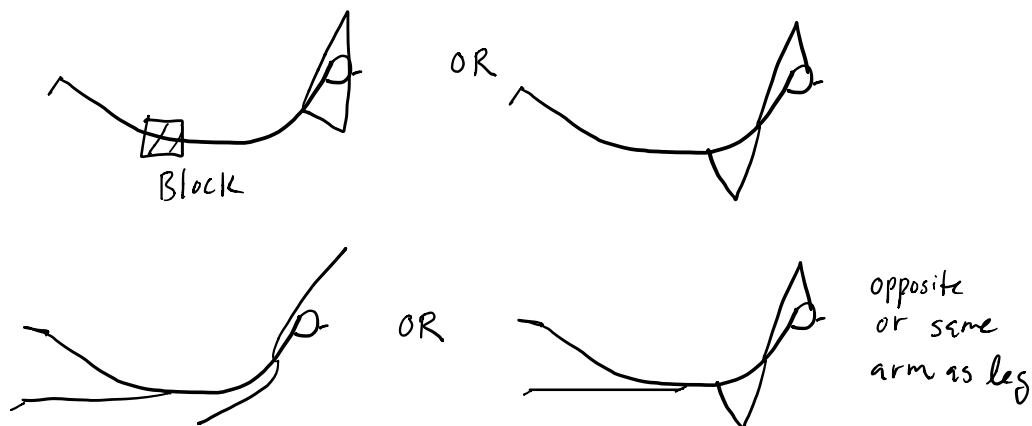


Salabhasana: Locust Pose

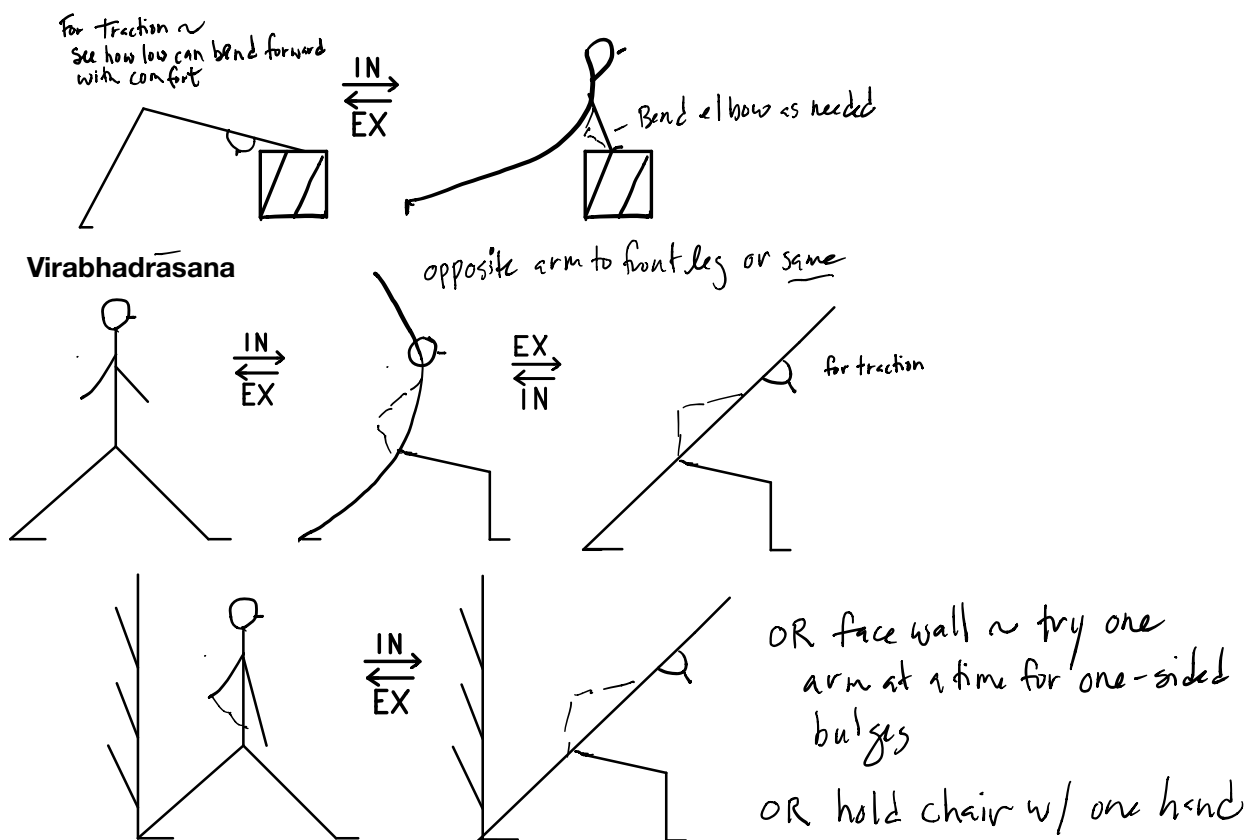




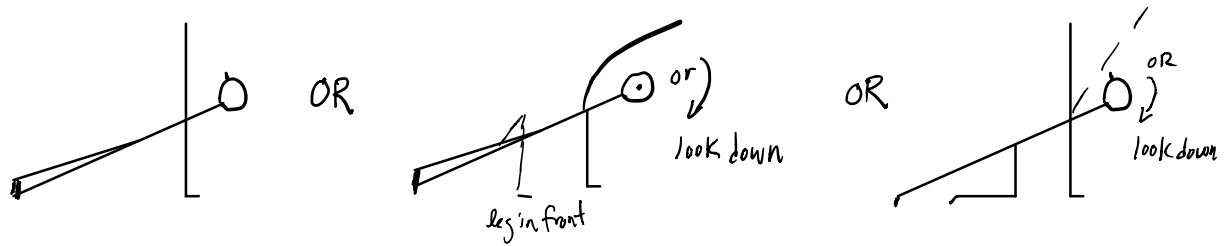
Ardha Salabhāsana: Half Locust Pose



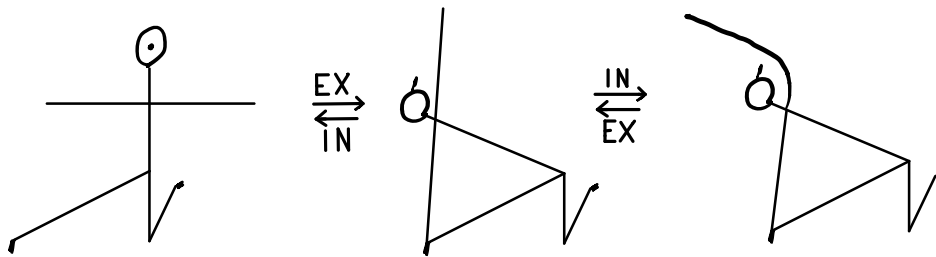
Chair Ūrdhva Mukha Śvanāsana with Adhomukha Śvanāsana: Upward/Downward Facing Dog



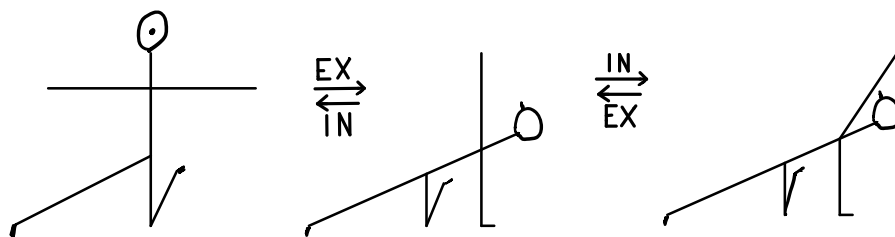
Vasīsthāsana - Side Plank



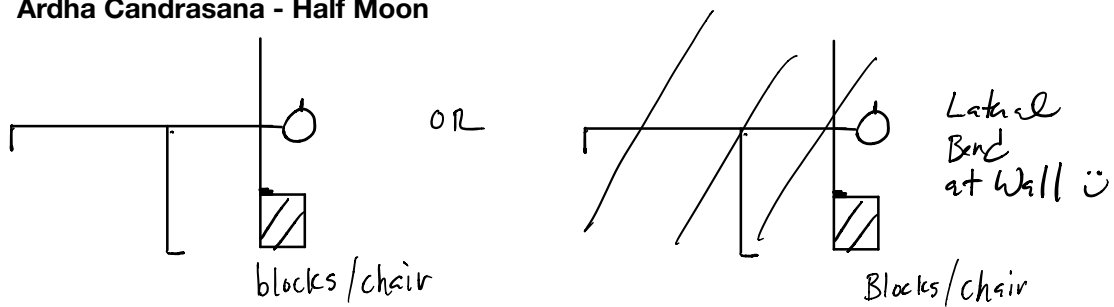
Parighāsana - Gate Keeper Pose



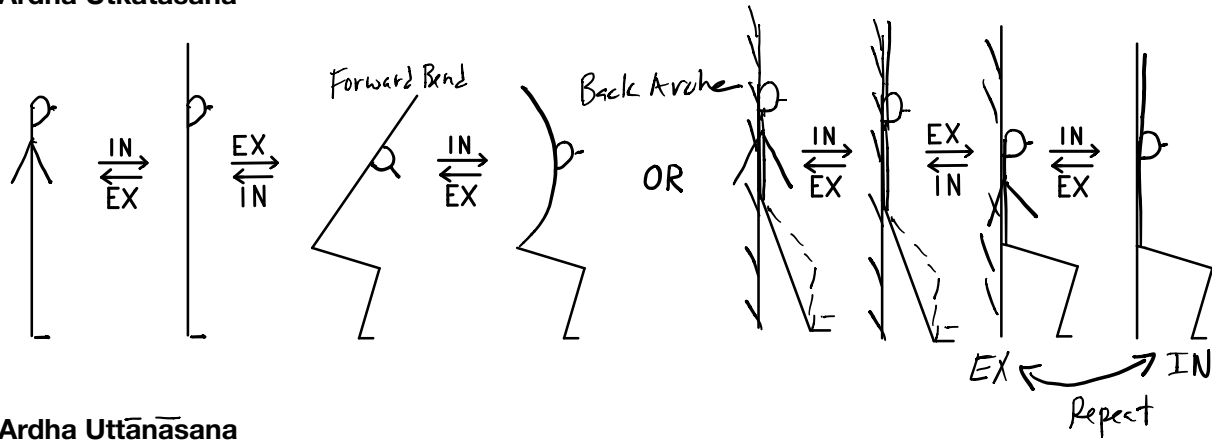
Vasīsthāsana Vinyasa - Side Plank Flow



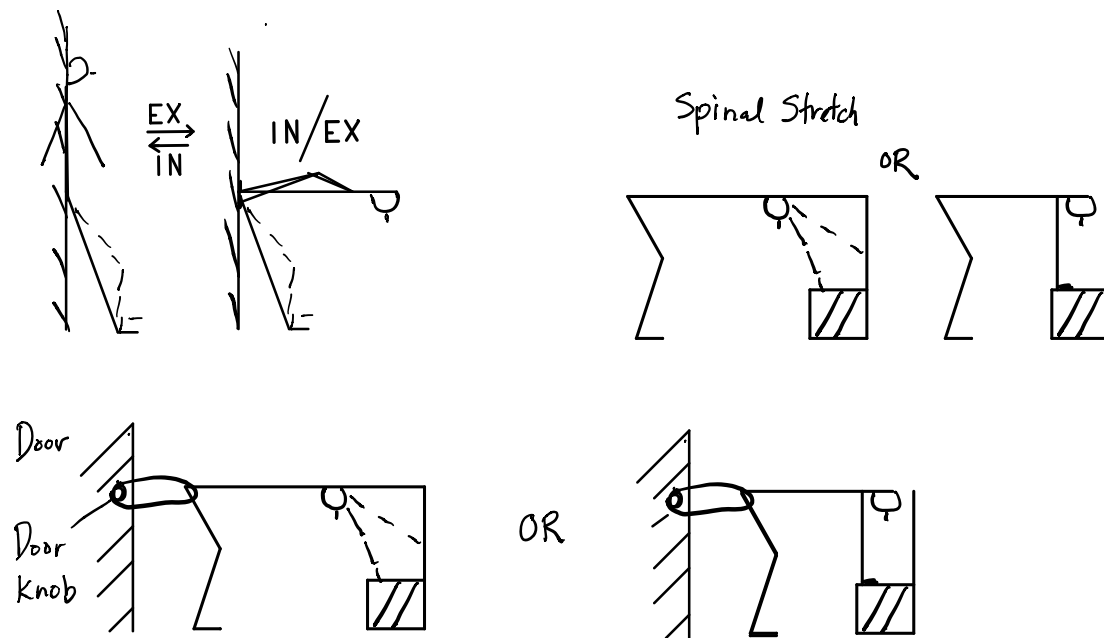
Ardha Candrāsana - Half Moon



Ardha Utkatāsana



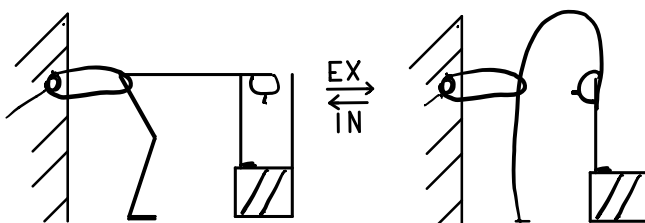
Ardha Uttānāsana



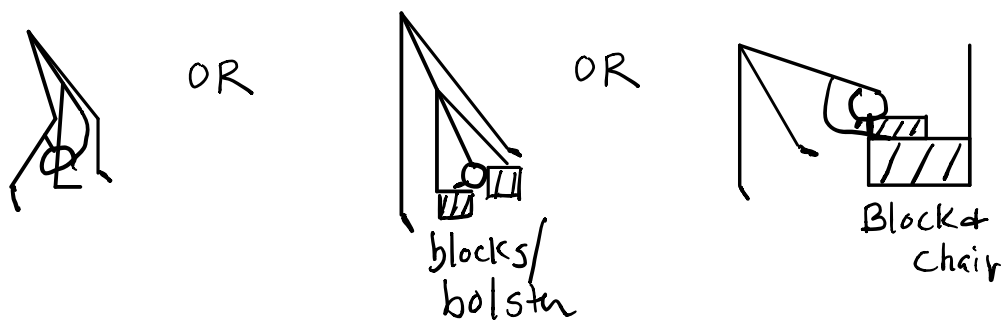
B. Spinal Stenosis - Narrowing of Space between the Vertebrae

Use Forward Bends & Traction Poses to Decompress Spine & Strengthening Lateral Poses

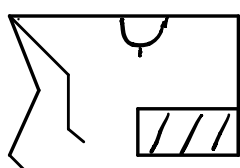
Cakravakāsana



Prasārita Pāda Uttānāsana - Spread-Legged Standing Forward Bend



Spinal Stretch

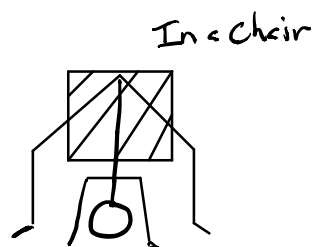


Ardhā ($\frac{1}{2}$) Uttānāsana

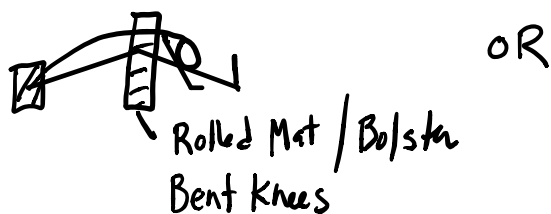
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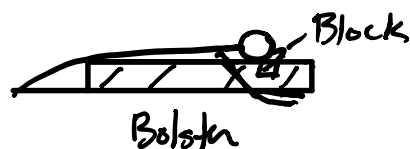
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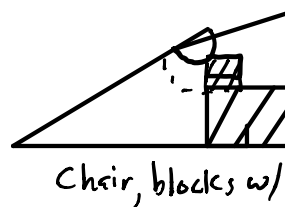
Paścimātānāsana - Seated Forward Bend - Stretching the West/Back Body



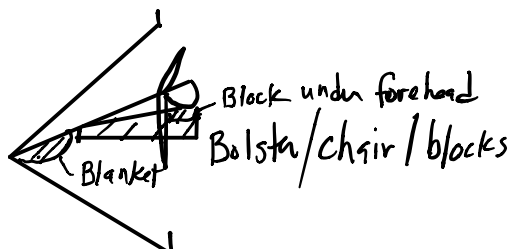
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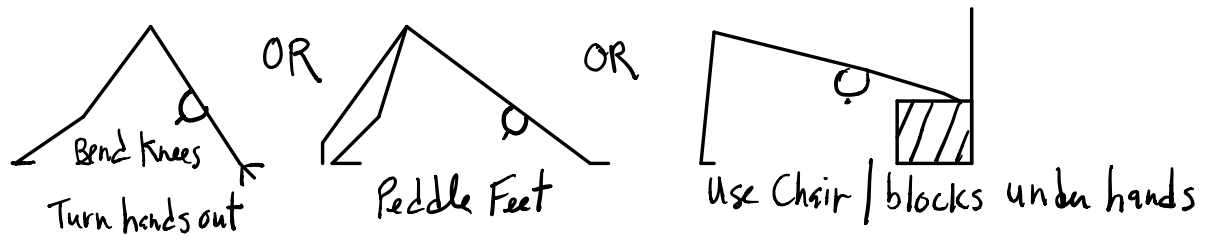
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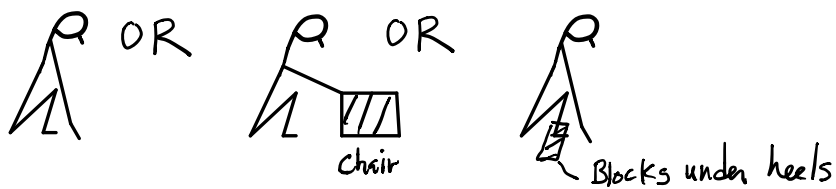
Upaviṣṭa Konāsana



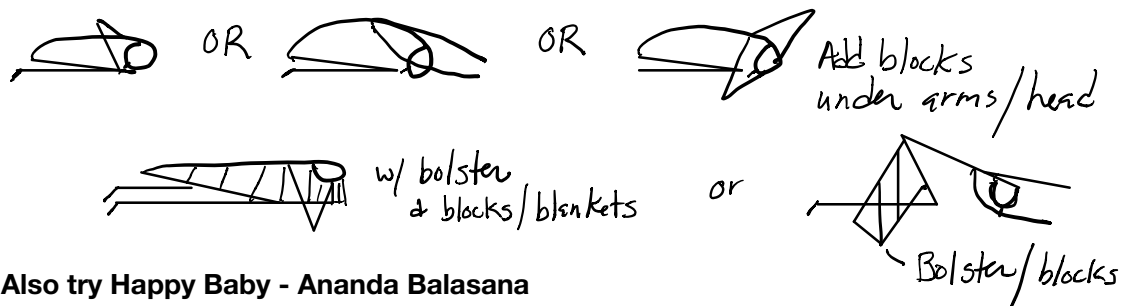
Adhomukha Svānāsana



Utkatāsana - Fierce/Powerful Squat

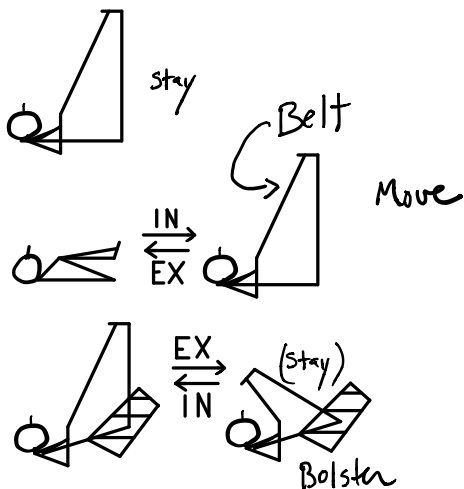


Child's Pose - Balāsana or Adhomukha Supta Vajrāsana

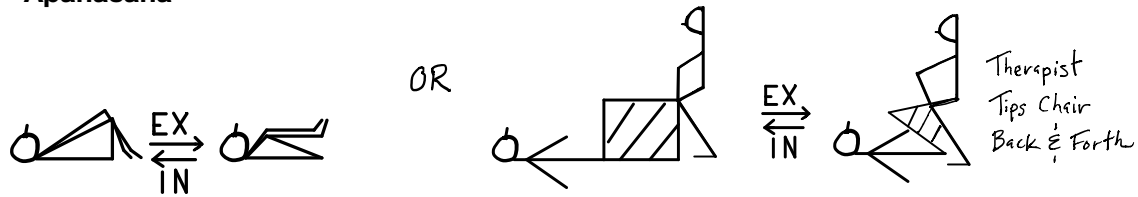


Also try Happy Baby - Ananda Balasana

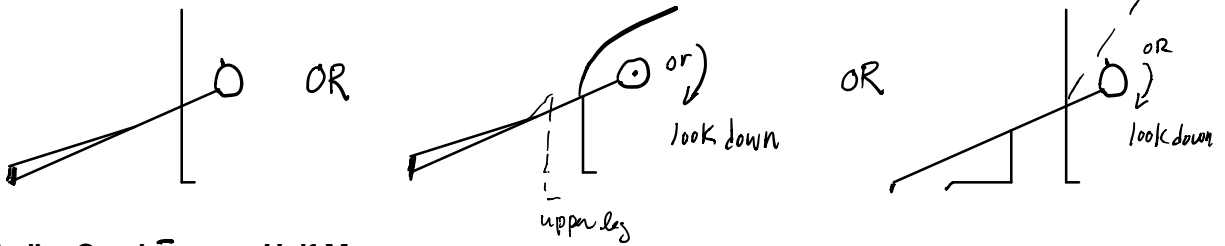
Supta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana Variations with a Belt



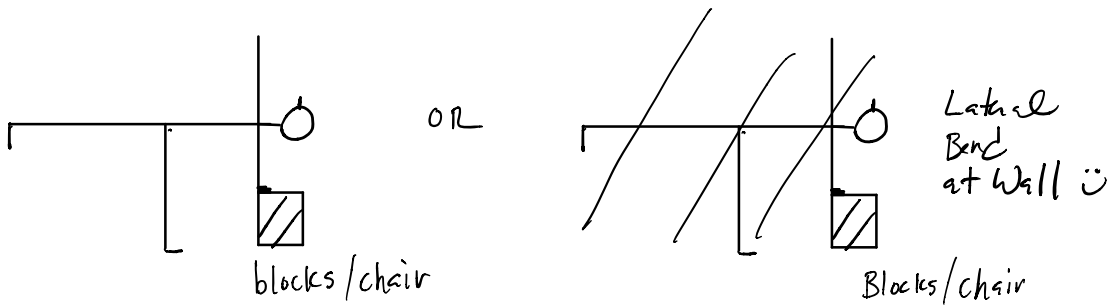
Apānāsana



Vasisthāsana - Side Plank



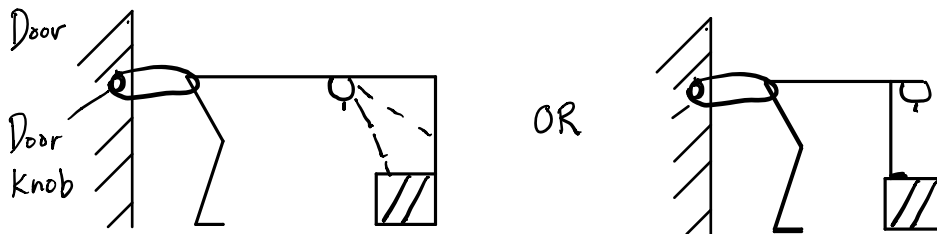
Ardha Candrāsana - Half Moon



C. Relaxing Muscle Spasms

Relax the Back & Linger in Supported Forward Bends or Do Traction Poses

Ardha Uttānāsana



Look above for drawings of the following poses - there are others too:

- Child's Pose - Balāsana or Adhomukha Supta Vajrāsana
- Full Utkatāsana - Fierce/Powerful Squat
- Supta Pādangusthāsana Variations with a Belt
- Pāścimatānāsana - Seated Forward - Supported with Props
- Apānāsana
- Ānanda Balāsana - "Happy Baby Pose"

OR

Muscle Spasms - Asymmetrical Poses - Contract One Muscle & Relax the Opposite

Linger in pose to relax spasm or tighten the opposite muscles longer using asymmetric poses - contract one muscle and relax the opposite or stay longer to relax golgi tendons, especially to relax quadratus lumborum and latissimus dorsi

E.g. Pārsvakōṇāsana, parighāsana, janusīrṣāsana (parivṛtti)

E. Spondylolisthesis

Moving Forward or Back & Strengthening Poses for Core (See Below) & Lateral Body (Plank/ Side Plank/Arm Balances)

Retrolisthesis - Verebrae budge back

Back Bends Move them Forward

See Bulging Discs Poses

Anterolisthesis - Verebrae budge forward

Forward Bends Move them Back

See Stenosis Poses

II. Balancing Sides of the Body - Lateral/ Asymmetric Poses

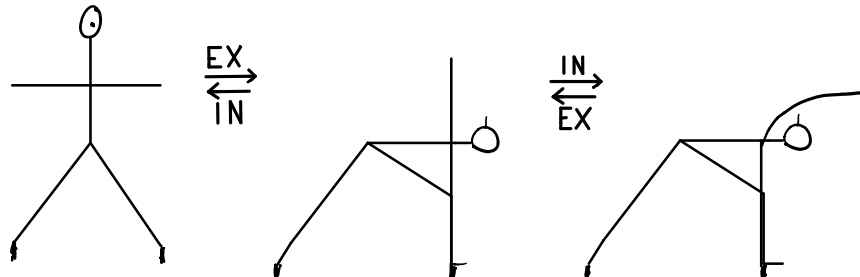
A. Scoliosis

All asymmetric poses - using muscles on one side and not the other

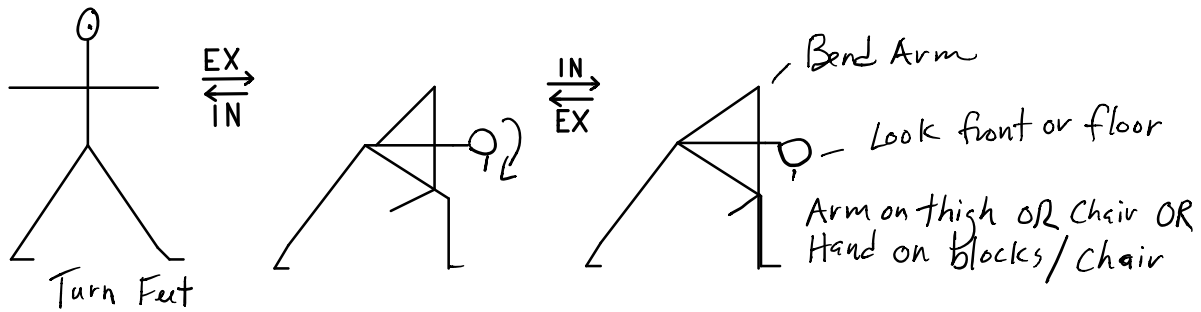
Lateral bends on concave/short side

Such as

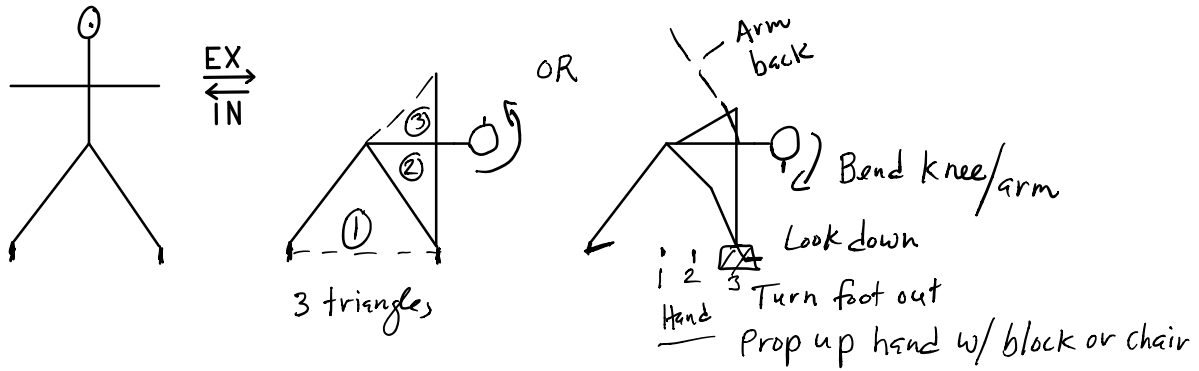
Utthita Pārsvakonāsana - Standing Side Angle Pose



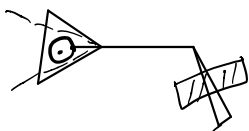
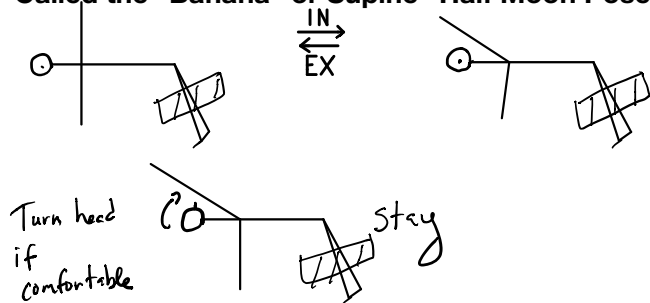
OR Modified



Utthita Trikonāsana (Pāśva) - Standing Triangle (3 Triangles/angles)" - Lateral Bend



Jathara Parivrtti Pāśva: Twisting the Jathara Agni (Digestive Fire) - Lateral Version
Called the "Banana" or Supine "Half Moon Pose"



L ankle over R to Left side OR Reverse

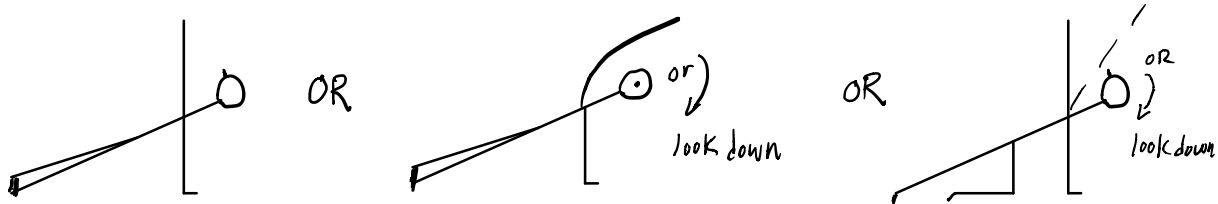
Add blankets/blocks under head/shoulders as needed

Bolster for tight hamstrings / LB Pain ~ Lordosis

Also try:

- Parighāsana - Gate Keeper Pose
- Ardha Candrāsana - Half Moon
- Side planks/strengtheners on convex side

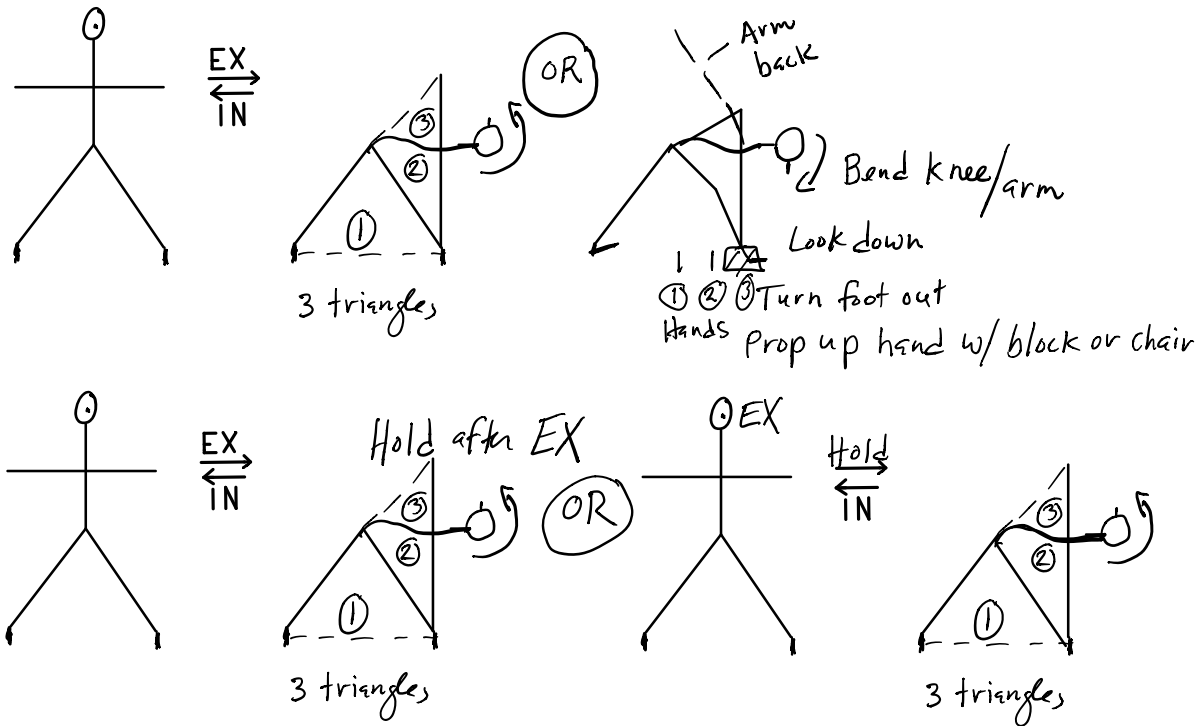
Vasisthāsana - Side Plank



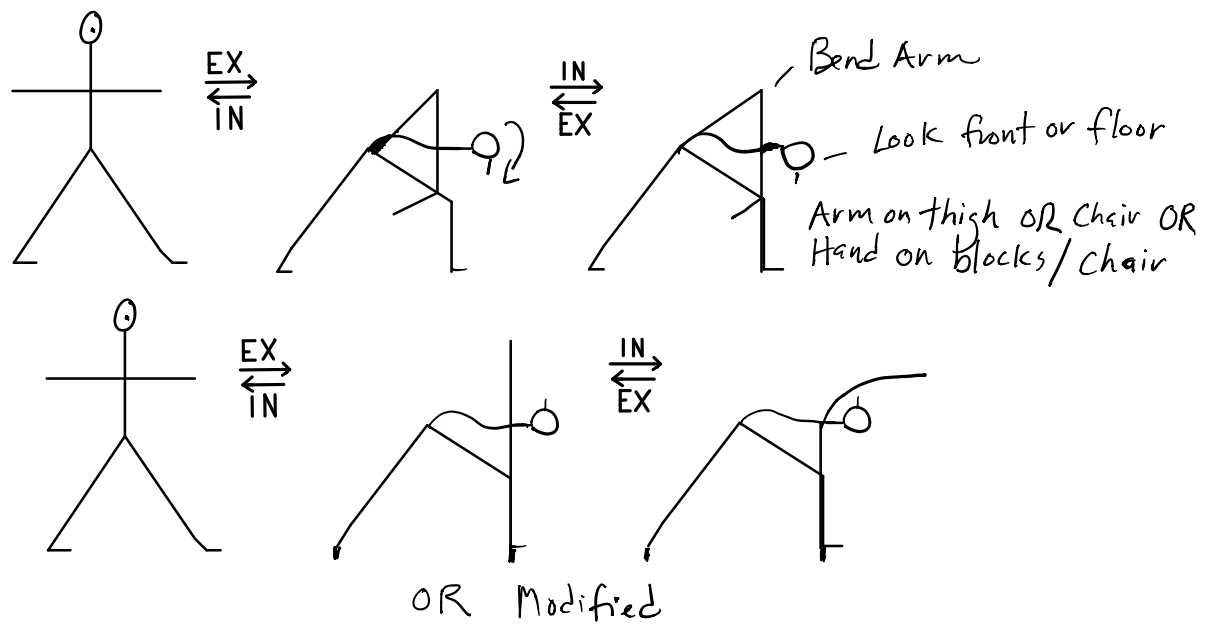
Rotated twists to de-rotate - Normally rotated towards convex side so de-rotate towards concave side

For the Upper Body Thoracic Curve

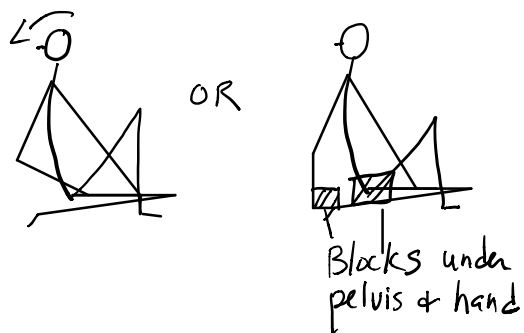
Utthita Trikonāsana (Parivrtti) - Standing Triangle (3 Triangles/angles)" - Rotated Twist



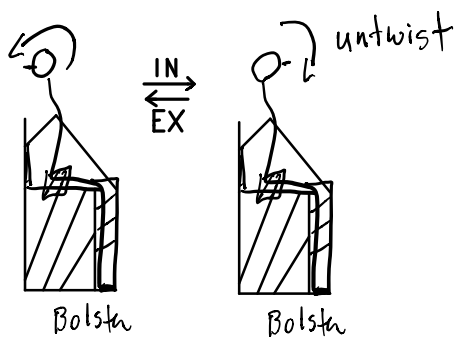
Utthita Pārsvakonāsana (Parivṛtti) - Standing Side Angle Pose (Rotated)



Ardha Matsyendrāsana - 1/2 Spinal Twist

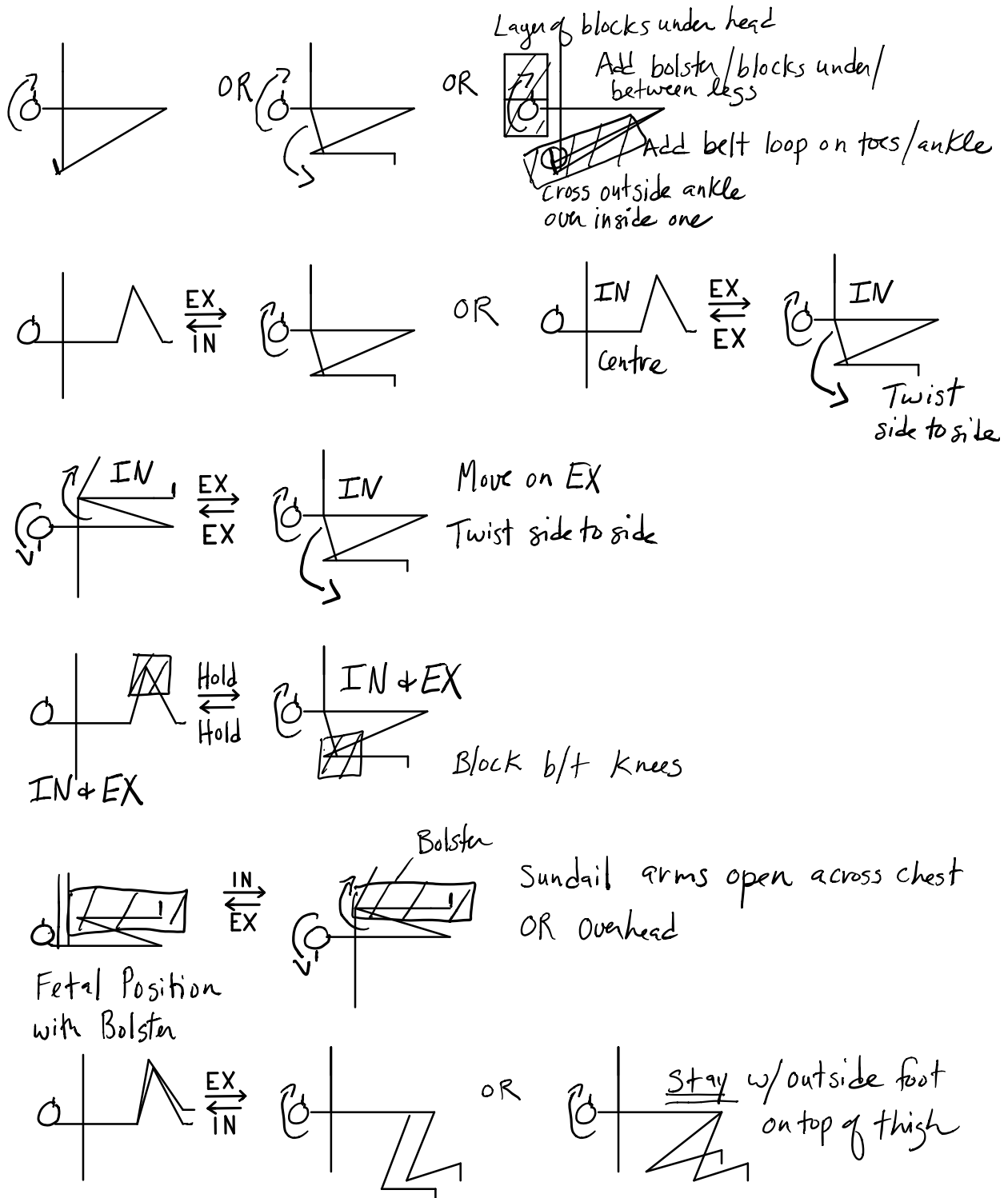


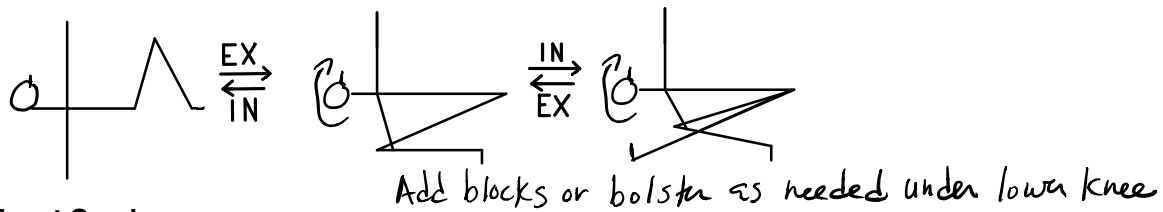
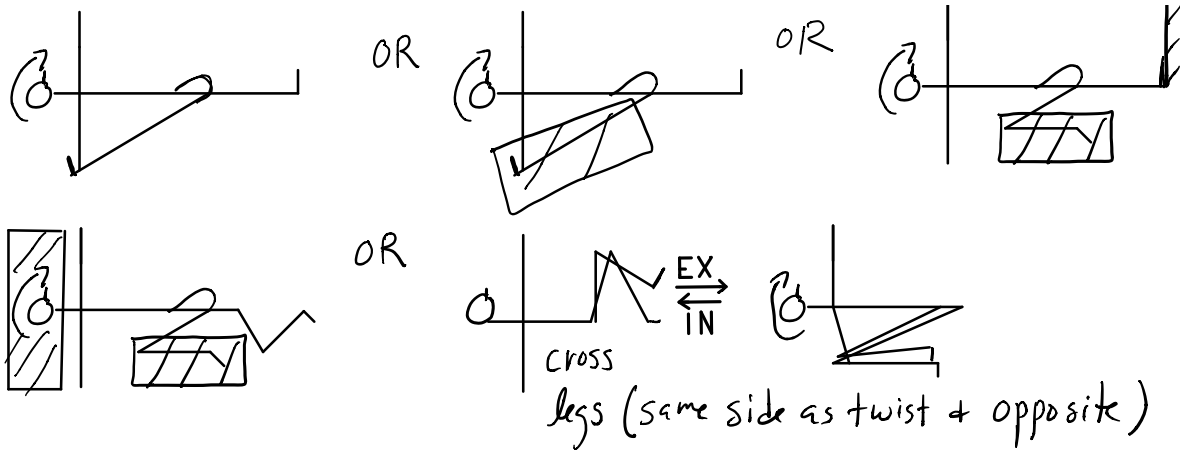
In Chair



Lower Body Twists to De-rotate Lumber Curves

Jathara Parivṛtti (Parivṛtti) - Twisting the Jathara Agni at the Nabhi (Belly Button)





B. Facet Syndrome

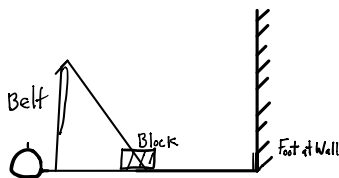
Facets get hooked on top of each other or muscles connecting facets get tight. Open one side & Close the other side in lateral poses.

Side Stretches help release facet joints in Lower Back: Try Leg Stretches 1 to 2 (Parsva) work Quadratus Lumborum (QL), Parsvakonasana, Parighasana or lateral balance poses (Vasisthasana) and Janusirsasana Parivrtti (a lateral bend).

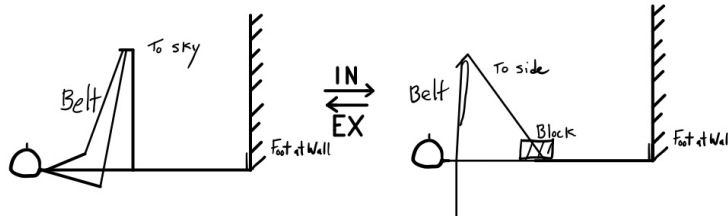
For Upper Back facet joints, try Bhujangasana for closing facet joints and Janusirsasana to open them. Try thoracic parivrtti too.

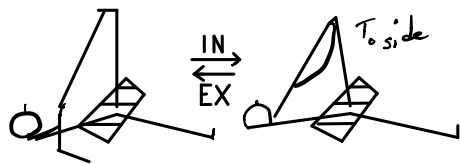
Try supta virasana also to get back muscles to work together.

Supta Eka Pādangusthāsana Pārśva with a Belt - Leg Stretch 2



Pārśva (Lateral Bends)





Parśva

See Above for these Poses

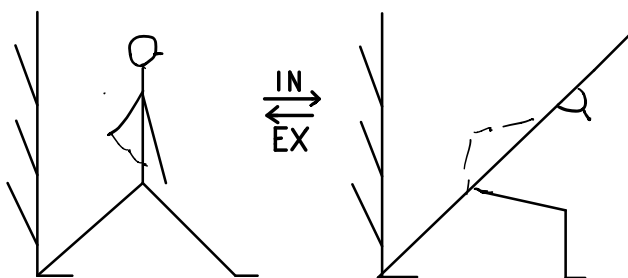
- Parighāsana - Gate Keeper Pose
- Vasisthāsana - Side Plank
- Ardha Candrāsana - Half Moon
- Thoracic Parivrtti - Upper back twist
- Januśirsāsana parivrtti - lateral bend
- Supta virāsana (See Healing Hips)

III. Creating Space

A. De-Compression/Traction - Stretch the Spine - "Ut-tan-asana" - Stretch Up & Elongate

See above for Traction Poses such as...

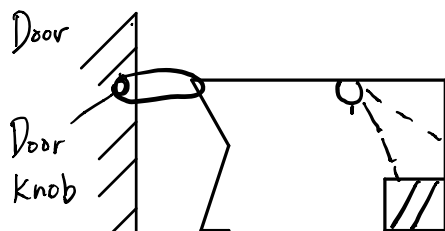
Virabhadrasana



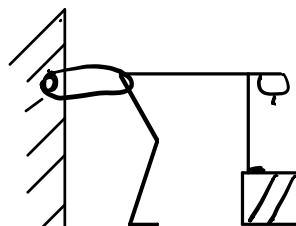
OR face wall ~ try one arm at a time for one-sided bulges

OR hold chair w/ one hand

Ardha Uttānāsana

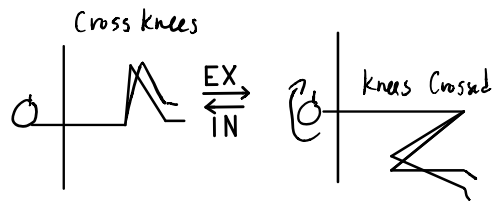


OR



B. Sacroiliac Joint (SI) Derangement

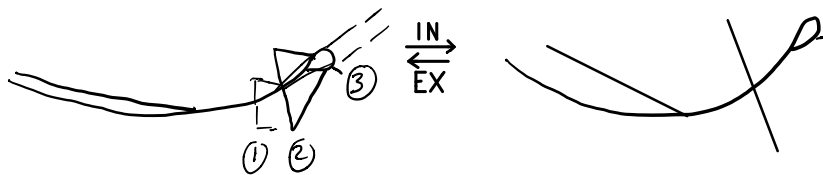
Poses with crossed legs when SI are locked - supine or seated



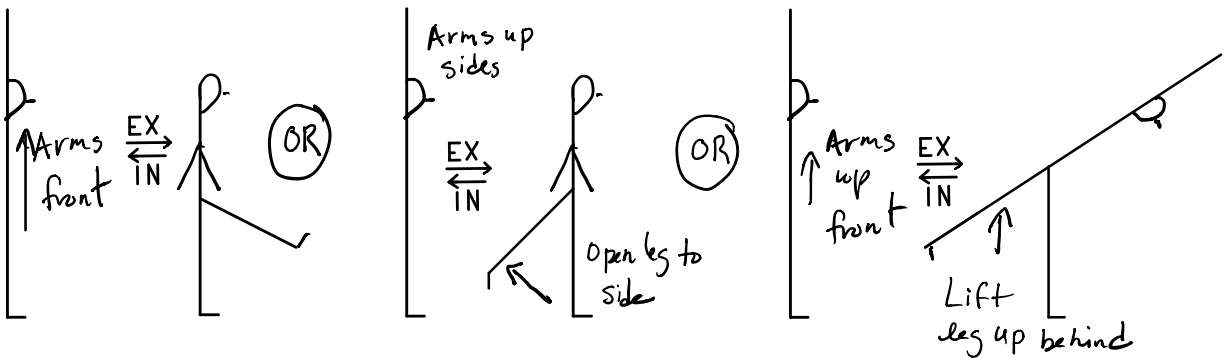
- a Twist side to side: twist to opposite side of knee crossed on top
- b stay on both sides
- c change crossing of knees

Strengthen Back Arches with Leg Movement for Mobile SI Joints

Vimānāsana- Airplane - See Kraftsow's Yoga for Wellness

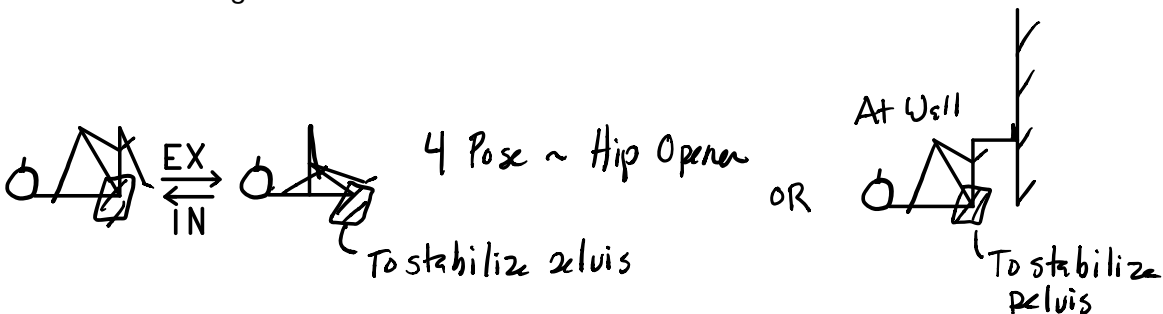


See Salabāsana Variations Above as well as Cakravakāsana.... Try Standing poses with Leg Movement such as Tadasana or Virabhadrasana III Variations

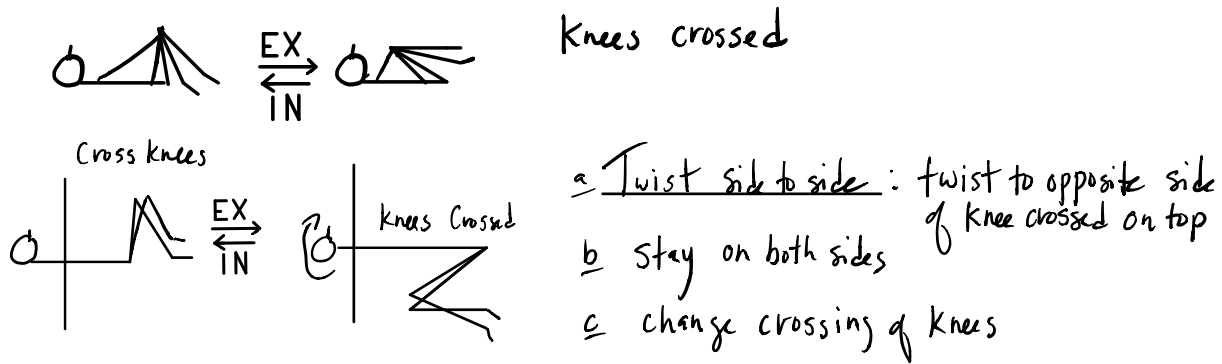


C. Piriformis Syndrome - Nerve Pain vs. Tightness

Number 4 poses for Nerve Pain b/c of Sciatic Nerve Running through Piriformis (15% of people only) - Leg must be more than 90 degrees at which point the muscle slips up over the nerve - Heel & Ankle must be Aligned



Add these for Tightness as well as all Parivrtti (Rotated Twist) Poses- Supine and Standing Iyengar style



Strengthen Core & Lower Back Muscles

See Back Strengtheners under Bulging Discs

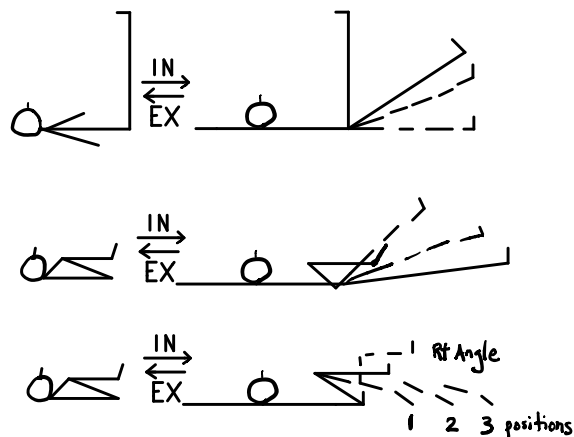
Bhujangāsana

Salabāsana

Dvipādapītham

Strengthen Core: Abdominals

Ūrdhva Prasārita Pādāsana



V. Align, Strengthen & Relax the Hips

See Healing Hips Principles & Practices to Align and Relax

VI. Hamstrings - Strengthen (too lax) or Stretch (too tight)? Sway Back or Tucked Tail? See Pascimatana Poses for Stretching Legs & Healing Feet & Legs for leg strengtheners

Tight Hamstrings:

- Uttānāsana - Standing Forward Bend
- Pārśva Uttānāsana - One-Sided Standing Forward Bend
- Prasārita Pādā Uttānāsana - Spread-Legged Standing Forward Bend
- Adhomukha Śvanāsana
- Pascimatānāsana - Seated Forward Bend - Stretching the West/Back Body
- Supta Pādangusthāsana 1 - Leg Stretches

VII. Arthritis - OA, RA & AS

Motion is Lotion & Strengthening is Key but...

Even though warmth allows joints to move more, getting warmer increases inflammation so watch out for RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis) vs. OA (Osteoarthritis), where Movement & Strengthening is Key!

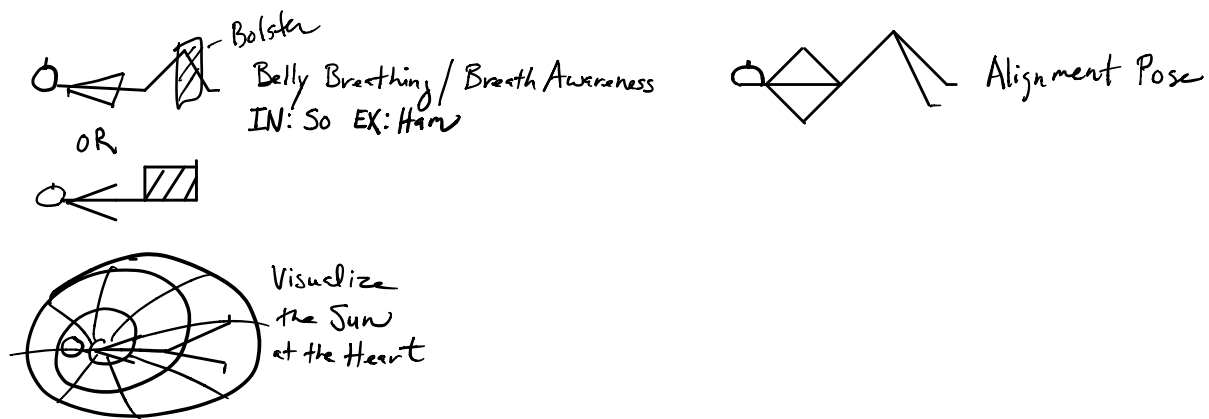
For AS (Ankylosing Spondylitis), don't try to defuse the spine. **Avoid rotated Twists** (like in Osteoporosis). Focus on chest openers via moving arms to sides.

Move arms and legs instead: Śpinal stretch, wall dog, in pairs or at chair.

Maggie's Experience of AS: Work on Traction, Standing Poses: Lateral Bends, Standing Back Arches, Forward Bends with Ardha Back Arches; **Rotated Twists are Contraindicated**

VI. Relaxing Mind & Emotions

See Healing Mind & Emotions Handout



This handout is based on Maggie's ideas from her experience and training, added to lecture notes from Loren Fishman's Lower Back Pain Presentation (SYTAR, 2015) & from his book Healing Yoga