



Side Bends

PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

Introduction

- Anatomical term: lateral flexion
- All side bends are asymmetrical
- One side of the body is contracting / working, the other is stretching/releasing
- Average range of movement = 20-40 degrees (varies with age)



Effects & Benefits

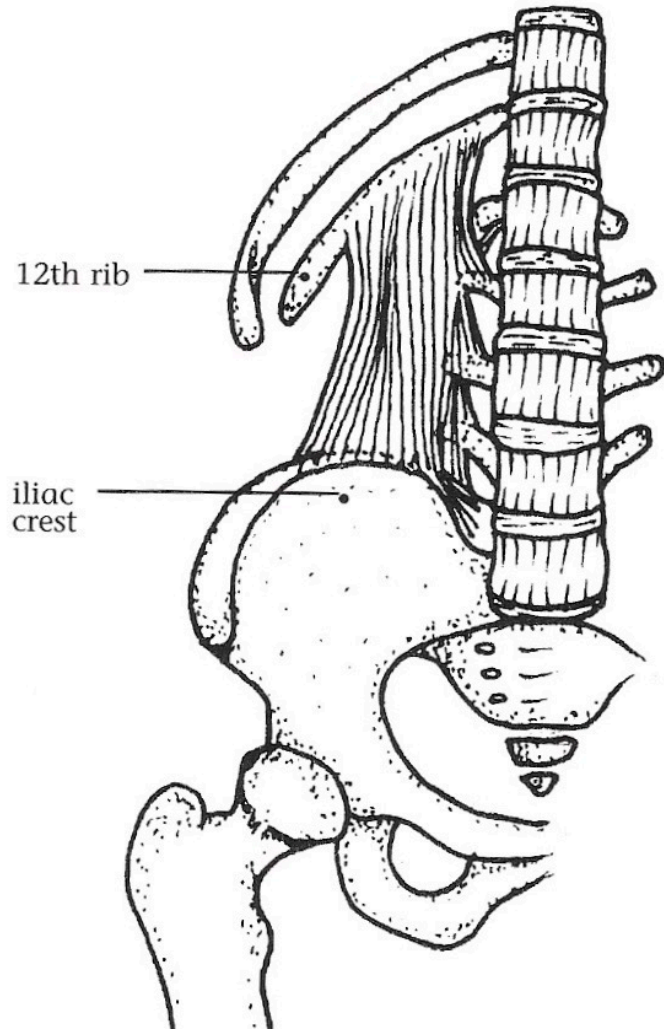
- Stretches and strengthens the muscles of the side body
- Supports our breathing capacity: maintain elasticity of the rib cage
- Deepens interoceptive awareness: breath - L/R lungs individually
- Promotes balance between left & right side of body
- Creates greater mobility and range of movement
- Leads to improved posture
- Can help with lower back pain
- Can include the shoulder & hips, bringing stretch/strength into these areas
- Helps to prepare the spine for other movements
- Excellent preparation for pranayama, and dharana/dhyana
- Feelings of spaciousness & expansion
- Chakras: manipura (solar plexus) and anahata (heart)

“[Side bends are] the most efficient way to stretch some of the major muscles of the back and sides, such as the latissimus dorsi and the quadratus lumborum, which may leave your lower back feeling more comfortable and flexible...”

Increasing your range of motion in the side body will help create more mobility in your spine and shoulders, leading to a feeling of greater ease and contentment in your body”.

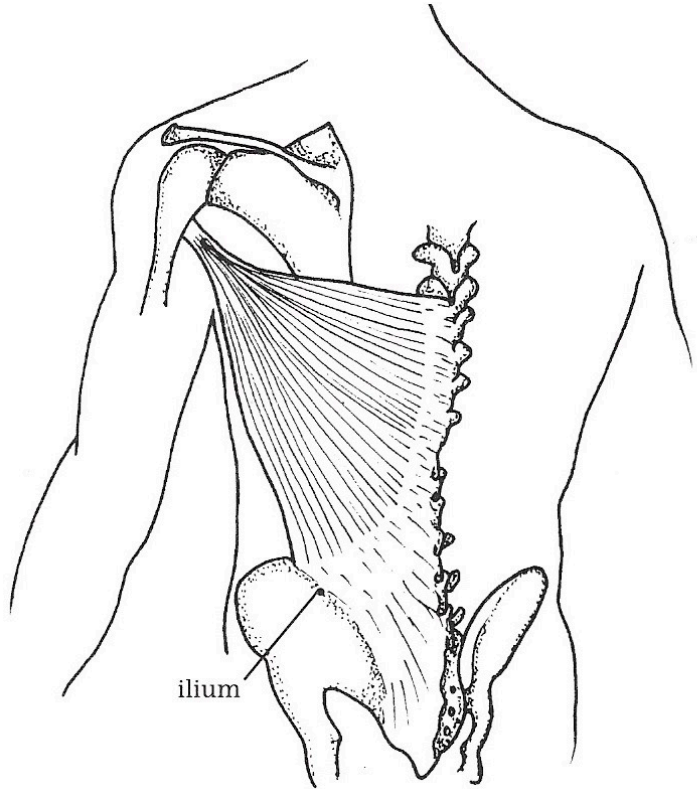
Jason Crandell

The key muscles: Quadratus Lumborum



- Deep back muscle
- Begins at the iliac crest, at the top of the back of the pelvis
- Attaches to the lumbar vertebrae and lowest rib
- In lateral flexion, the QL on one side shortens and the other stretches and lengthens.

The key muscles: Lattisimus Dorsi



- Begins at the thoracic & lumbar vertebrae and attach to the top of the humerus (upper arm bone)
- Involved in lateral bends where the arm is taken overhead

Image Credit: The Muscles Book, Paul Blakey

General Principles in Side Bends



- Steady foundations: feet, legs, pelvis
- Practice ‘evenly’ both sides; what is ‘even’ – number of breaths or a felt-sense? So...
- ... one side may need longer or even a second time on that side only
- Use the breath: inhale – lengthen & prepare, exhale engage core muscles
- What is the intention of the pose?

Ahimsa: applying non-harm in asana

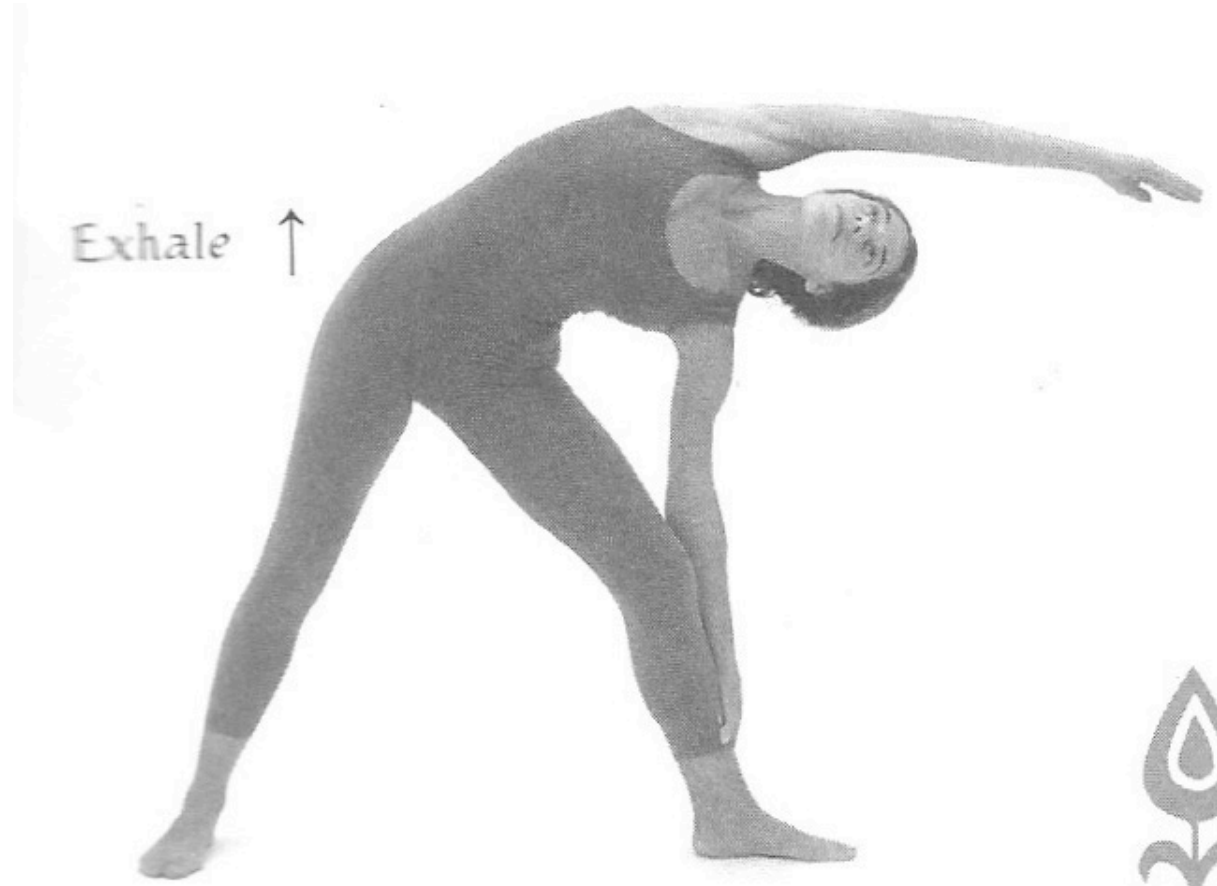
The following may require side bends to be practiced with caution, modification or omission...

- Low back pain / sciatica / other conditions affecting the back or spine
- Sacroiliac (SI) joint issues
- Pelvic pain e.g. in pregnancy (depending on the asana)
- Hip / knee pain (depending on the asana)
- Shoulder injuries (where the arm is taken overhead)
- High Blood pressure / cardiac issues (where arm is held overhead)

Spotlight on Trikonasana

- Utthita = extended
- Tri = three
- Kona = angle





Trikonasana

A side bend or a side stretch?
It depends...

One asana – different approaches

Iyengar approach:

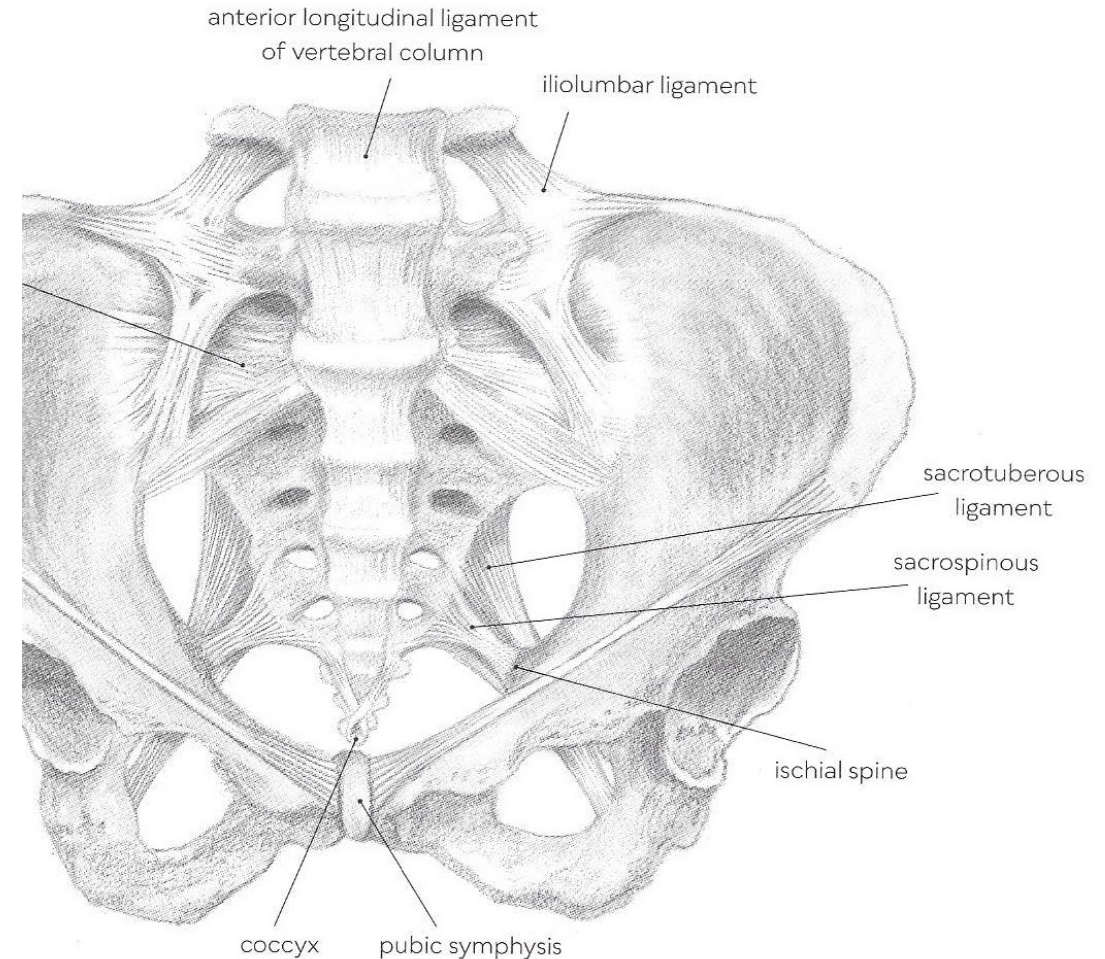
- Maintains length on both sides of the torso
- Very precise application of the form of the asana

Viniyoga approach:

- One side contracts while the other flexes – the upper side of the torso creates an 'arc'
- Focus on the functional movement of the body
- The base of the pose can be adjusted (e.g. one or both feet facing forwards)

The pelvis is important: some revision...

- Recap – pelvic structure and SI joint. The SI joint is designed for stability
- SI joint is passive
- Over-exerting the pelvis into a more 'open' position may lead to tension on the ligaments supporting the SI joint
- *“avoid the hip bump... simply side hinge without the bump or let the hand land where it lands”*. Beth Spindler



Choosing your base...

Keeping feet parallel brings the focus & emphasis more into side of the body.

Turning feet - can allow us to go further into the pose and creates a deeper stretch on the hip of the back leg. However, this action can place pressure into the pelvis/SI joint, so listen to your lower back.

Trikonasana: When Practicing-

- Create a strong and stable base through the feet & legs
- Keep the front of the chest spacious – shine from the heart
- Keep space around the neck
- If you have a tendency to excessively hyperextend the knee, be aware of this and micro bend the knee if needed
- Stirha and sukham – effort & ease / good space (Sutra 2.46)
- Discernment: make wise use of props (bricks, chair)
- Remember the intention of the pose – reaching the hand to the floor may or may not happen (vairagya – letting go of the outcome, santosha – contentment)

Side Bends: Preparing & Counterpose

Preparing the body:

- Pawanmuktasana / joint freeing series
- Warm and stabilise pelvis e.g. utkatasana (chair), adho mukha svanasana (dog), tadasana, uttanasana, navasana
- Hip release- Warriors 1, 2, vrksasana
- Spine: cat, simple twists / side bends, reverse warrior, extended side angle

Counterposes:

- Asana to neutralise the spine e.g. tadasana, dandasana, adho mukha svanasana
- Shoulders: simple hug through to garudasana (eagle) arms
- Drawing sense inwards: e.g. ardha uttanasana, apanasana, paschimottonasana
- Semi supine / savasana

Sources of inspiration:

- Gary Krafstow
- Kristine Weber
- Judith Hanson Lasater
- Peter Blackaby

Images (where not already specified):

Canva