

❧ Sitting Spinal Twist ❧

This spinal twist in sitting position is taught in many basic sequences of traditional Thai massage, and it can be helpful to loosen the upper body, mobilize the hips, and open the chest area. It's important to work with incremental depth and to keep the receiver's upper body and head erect during the twisting. The therapist should mimic the movement of the receiver as he twists and always be aware of breathing patterns.

Some variations of this sitting twist approach the receiver from the sides rather than from behind the body, but they can sometimes be awkward. There are also several different body positions and arm grips that may be used. Always take into consideration the relative height of both people and the size and length of the practitioner's arms and hands when choosing one particular style over another. Let's discuss the standard model first and then a few variations.



Setup

Kneel on one leg while you brace the top of your partner's thigh with your opposite upper calf. Don't press your knee into her leg; just block it and hold it in place with your upper leg. Reach for your partner's hands and ask her to intertwine her fingers and place them behind her head (not on her neck). Reach forward, slip your forearms through the space created by the position of her arms, and hold onto her wrists with a "pretzel grip." Support her back with your upper abdomen or rib cage, and bring her upper torso toward your chest slightly to open her chest and to keep her head from drooping. Remember to maintain medium pressure with your blocking leg.

Execution

Pay attention to your partner's breath, or ask her to inhale deeply. As she exhales, twist her body and also twist your own body in the same way. As you do this, swivel your toes as necessary so that your hips follow the movement of the twist. In other words, you and your partner twist together. Twist her upper torso at a medium-slow speed until you reach a point of resistance, and remain there for two or three seconds. Come back to the center position on a mutual inhale, and repeat the twist a few more times. You might twist a little deeper with successive twists, but be sensitive and don't exceed the person's natural limit. Also remember that both people should exhale while twisting, and both should inhale when returning to the starting position. After a few twists in one direction, switch your kneeling and leg blocking positions, realign the body, wait until you both finish inhaling, and repeat the twisting movements in the opposite direction while you both exhale.

If the therapist is larger or taller than the receiver, or has long arms or large hands, it may be uncomfortable or impractical to use the pretzel grip. In this case, place your hands and wrists over and in front of her forearms near the elbows and lightly hold her upper arms at the biceps. Twist in the same way as above, using this hand position.

Standing variation

At times, because of differences in body size and height, it may be uncomfortable or difficult to do this technique in half-kneeling position. If this is the case, do it by standing behind the receiver. Support her back with your legs, use the “open wing grip” described above, work with the breath, and twist her upper body as you also twist and swivel your body.

Some vertebrae may pop and crack during deep spinal twists, and this is a natural consequence of the technique. In Thailand, some traditional therapists use “bone setting” chiropractic techniques to crack the vertebrae with quick, jerky movements and spinal twists. Do not use these techniques unless you are adequately trained to do so, and then, only when they are needed or desired by the receiver.

Whether you are half-kneeling or standing and bracing a client’s leg or using a pretzel or open wing grip, practice these techniques with care, breath coordination, and good body mechanics.

Reminders

- Decide which arm grip and body position works best for each individual.
- Twist several times in one direction with a mutual exhale, then switch the leg pattern, and twist several times in the other direction.
- Work with incremental depth for each sequential twist: light, medium, deep.
- Swivel your hips in the same direction as you move your partner’s body.
- Always inhale together when returning to the center; follow the breathing pattern of your partner.
- Twist in a flowing way, at a medium rhythm, not with quick or jerky movements.
- Keep your partner’s body straight, so her upper torso and head remain erect and not collapsed forward. Remind her when necessary to keep her head erect.



Pretzel grip



Open grip