

Spinal Twists in Thai Massage

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An integral aspect of traditional Thai massage is the so-called “passive yoga.” These are exercises in which the therapist places the receiver in certain yoga *asanas*, taking into account the relative flexibility of the receiver.

Instructors of Thai massage often encourage their students to practice yoga so they can personally experience the benefits. Thai therapists who regularly practice yoga may experience the following:

- Yoga protects and strengthens the body, calms the mind and deepens the breath;
- Knowledge of basic yoga theory provides understanding of the energy system in Thai massage, the theory of the 10 energy channels, or *sib sen*;
- We learn about indications and contraindications for certain *asanas*;
- Our personal practice enables us to see how important it is to assume postures gradually. We also learn when and where to stop, and this is extremely useful in our work with others.

This presentation deals with the application of spinal twists in Thai massage. We will practice several twists in various positions and learn which part of a massage sequence may be most appropriate for each twist. The proper timing of a spinal twist in a flowing sequence of Thai massage is relevant because Thai massage isn't merely an application of techniques, stretches and manipulations; it is a beautiful, peaceful and holistic act of healing energy on and with another person.

It is important to know indications and contraindications for the application of all spinal twists. This is why we should conduct an initial interview with the receiver to learn about the condition of his back, any injuries and surgeries, or other special circumstances (e.g. pregnancy) which may be contra-indicated.

Benefits from twists:

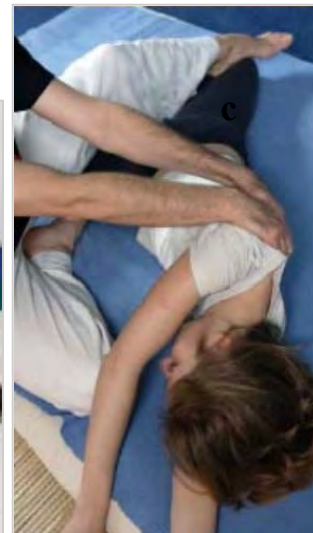
- During the stretching of abdominal muscles, internal organs are toned. This is conducive to digestion and it relieves constipation;
- Tension in the back is relieved and fatigue is alleviated;
- During spinal twists the vertebrae are mobilized;
- Twists allow more nourishment to reach the roots of the spinal nerves and this has a positive effect on the sympathetic nervous system.

Contraindications:

- Pregnancy
- Spinal operations
- Herniated discs and other degenerative disc diseases, sciatica

There is no need to do more than one or two spinal twists during a typical treatment, but experienced therapists need to know more than that if we are to choose the most appropriate twist for each receiver. Since it is extremely important for the receiver to breathe properly during the twist, the therapist, whenever necessary, should remind his client to inhale and exhale as needed. Always encourage long exhalations and keep the receiver in the twisted position for a short while after the exhalation..

Supine position



The receiver lies on his back with one leg bent, forming a right angle, with his knee touching the mat. The therapist is positioned on the side of the stretched leg and locks the bent knee against the mat using his sole. He pulls the arm (on the same side as the bent knee) and walks his palms/fingers across receiver's back. To work on a large client, you may hold her shoulder blade with one hand, and walk the second hand across the back. This twist is usually performed at the end of a series of exercises on one side of the body.



The receiver lies down on his back with one knee bent and one foot alongside the outside of the opposite knee. Place your lower leg (calf) through the triangle formed by her bent leg. Now pull her hand and walk your palms and fingers across her back. This twist is performed as the last of series of exercises on one leg.

Assume the archer position, and block your client's armpit using your sole. Holds her knee and perform an inward rotation. This twist is often performed after work on second outside line of the thigh (*sen kalathari*).



Side position



From the archer position, brace your client's extended leg using the area around your knee and stretch that leg using the dorsum of your foot. Next, place one palm on that stretched leg and the other one on her shoulder. Ask your client to breathe in, to breathe in and when she exhales, press her shoulder towards the floor. This twist is performed after working on leg lines.

Position yourself behind the receiver in archer position. Place one palm on the receiver's hip and the other at the junction between her torso and arm. When your partner exhales, push her shoulder towards the floor and hold it in position.





Sit behind your partner. Block her shoulder blade with the sole of your inside foot and block her sacrum with the other sole. On her exhalation, pull her arm while leaning backward. This twist is often performed after foot walking on the back. Be aware of possible emotional release.

Stand with your feet in line with your client's groin, and with your toes straight. Drape her outside arm over her chest and lower neck. As she exhales, pull her other arm upward while bending your knees and lifting with your legs. Stand fully erect and hold for a few breaths. For a deeper twist, press your knee against her hip. This twist is often used as the last exercise in a side position sequence.



Prone position

While working on the back lines in prone position, we can also perform a small twist. The client's head should be turned in the direction of the shoulder being twisted. Kneel above her and place her arm on your knee. One hand pulls her shoulder upward and the other one walks and pushes along her third back line.



Sitting position

The tango

The receiver sits in a comfortable position and places her palm on her ear. You kneel next to her and place one of your palms on her elbow and the other one on her opposite shoulder. As you both exhale, push her elbow and pull on her shoulder to perform the twist.



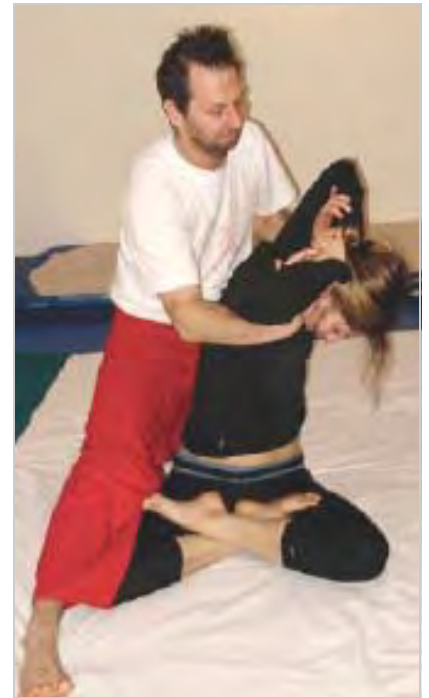
The receiver sits comfortably and places her palm on her ear. You are in a standing position and you place one arm on the client's elbow and with your other arm, you grab his wrist. Block the receiver's thigh with your foot and simultaneously pull his arm inward and push his elbow outward.





The receiver clasps both hands behind her head. Standing behind her, place your leg next to her spine and hold both elbows with your hands. The twist is performed during exhalation. Repeat several times on each side.

The receiver sits in lotus or half-lotus position, with hands clasped behind her head. She is relaxed and should not help you. Block her thigh using your knee or your extended leg, push your forearms under her upper arms and holds her forearms near her wrists. Next, gently push her torso downward and swing gently from left to right. Progressively increase the intensity of the swing if your client is fully relaxed.



Notes:

