
The Back Leg in Lateral Standing Poses

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Guruji once said that he could instantly tell the difference between an experienced practitioner and a casual one by noting the outer back knee in Utthita Trikonasana. Experienced practitioners turn the back knee out. Casual ones turn the back knee in. I will write about the back leg in lateral standing poses.

When we do a sequence of poses from Parsva Utthita Padasana to Utthita Trikonasana, Utthita Parsvakonasana, and Virabhadrasana 2, we find the weight is naturally heavier to the forward leg and lighter to the back leg as we proceed through these lateral standing poses. We need to counter that tendency and maintain the weight on the back leg to make it progressively heavier as we go to the pose. The back leg should be grounded, made dense, with the earth element in the bones.

Generally, for the back leg, we have to intensify the pressure to the outer heel/side of the foot. This requires the lift of the inner ankle, shin, and thigh, and maintaining the thigh back: with each of these actions initiated before bending into the pose. Many nuances can be applied to achieve these efforts. In the case of pain in the foot, ankle, knee, or hip, you can adapt the pose to improve these conditions on both legs.

A lot of attention is given to the forward leg because it will cause pain if excessive weight is borne on the problem side. Measures such as raising the forward leg foot on a slanting plank, quarter round, block, or even higher on a Viparita Karani box can alleviate the pain. Putting the back foot to a rope wall and holding the rope or positioning a chair to place the forward hand higher can lessen the weight on the forward leg and avoid pain. But that is still addressing the pain felt in the forward leg.

We may not feel discomfort when the problem leg is the back leg. We overlook addressing that side because it may not hurt as much, if at all, because the weight is less. But the weight should also be evenly borne on the back leg. You may find, if you administer to the back leg, you may improve the pose and the ailment.

I present adaptations to the back leg of the lateral standing poses. They should not all be applied at once. Practice using one of the supports at a time, starting with the lift to the inner back foot. Work up the leg from there. Repeat the same pose using each support separately to gain a deeper understanding of the effects and how it benefits your condition. Then repeat without support in the middle of the room with the imprint of the supports fully engaged.

Experienced practitioners turn the back knee out.

Casual ones turn the back knee in.



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

1 Start in Utthita Hasta Padasana using the wall to support the back leg foot. Position the outer heel and small toe, the entire side of the foot, down the wall to the floor. Place a folded washcloth, pad (FIGURE 1), or knee rod (FIGURE 2) under the big toe ball mound and inner heel so the inner foot is raised. Step the forward leg away from the wall and stand with the hands on the hips. Turn the forward leg out to Parsva Utthita Hasta Padasana. Strongly lift the back leg inner ankle to the wall as if trying to touch the outer ankle to the wall. At the same time resist the outer ankle inwards. Lengthen the toes forward and the inner heel backward to avoid shortening the inner foot. The ankle should become thin or narrow. Lift the inner shin and thigh towards the wall. Maintain the back leg efforts and proceed to the lateral standing pose. This is the simplest adaptation.

2 Start as above. Position a block or similar object (FIGURE 3) under the inner shin. Lift the inner shin away from the block, even more when going to the pose and holding the pose. Guruji did this to me with a sharp object and I would be injured if I did not lift the inner shin! My back leg inner shin has not forgotten this.

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FIGURE 4

- 3 Position a long knee rod to the outer shin with two belts, between the gastrocnemius and anterior tibialis muscles. A “dent” will appear when you move the outer shin to the inner shin and that is the place to position the rod. The buckles are on the outer side tightened from front to back. Lift the inner foot, inner shin, and move the outer shin back. **FIGURE 4** shows the pose independent of the wall for the purpose of depicting the prop clearly. You can use the wall for the back foot.
- 4 Knee rods keep the patella centered and work the outer knee ligaments back (**FIGURE 5**). If knee rods are not available, position belts above and below the knee. Turn the front of the back leg knee out and move the outer knee back in the direction of the wall behind you.
- 5 Position a belt around the middle thigh (**FIGURE 6**).^{*} Move the inner, front, and outer thigh away from the belt and the back of the thigh towards the belt.



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6

^{*}Please note: It is possible to position a belt to the top thigh. However, it is short term relief that may not improve the situation and could make it worse. Ligaments and tendons are non-vascular tissues and the blood supply at the top of the thigh could be diminished by the belt and cause injury. If applied for a short time and not pulled overly tight, no harm will come. However, in my opinion, it is better not to use a belt to the top thigh.

FIGURE 7



- 6 Step the back leg inside a lower rope and step away from the wall until the rope is taut and the body is perpendicular to the rope wall, as if the back foot is up to the wall (FIGURE 7, shown with Utthita Trikonasana). Move the outer femur head inwards and lift the inner femur head higher than the outer. The strong effort must be maintained on the femur head, especially when going to and while in the pose. The pull of the rope releases and softens the inner groin towards the outer leg. This action will also open the lower organic body in the outer basin of the pelvis on that side.

Ardha Chandrasana is also a lateral standing pose, but is a special case because the leg is raised.

- 1 Inflate the back foot big toe ball mound before lifting it from the floor (FIGURE 8). Lift the small toe up to the ceiling and turn the foot slightly out (FIGURE 9). Lift and extend the entire raised leg to the inner foot. Resist the outer leg to the inner leg and move it towards the hip socket.

FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9



2 Raise a trestle on blocks. Then position the outer shin under the trestle (**FIGURE 10**). The raised leg may be low, but the effect is felt. A helper can position a rope to a weight and hang it from the outer shin (**FIGURE 11**). The weight should be close to the shin. Lift the inner shin up against the weight.

3 Place knee rods and belts, or just belts above and below the knee. Vertically bifurcate the kneecap to the outer and inner knee, respectively.



FIGURE 10



FIGURE 11

This is a snapshot of the back leg in the lateral standing poses. Happy practice!

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