

is an optimal exercise for both the hip flexors and the abdominal muscles.

Exhaling, lower the right leg.

Vinyasas eight to fourteen

Repeat for the left leg.

Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana

INTENSE BOUND HALF LOTUS

Drishti Nose

Vinyasa one

Since this is a surprisingly complex posture, we will break it down into phases. Beginners should study these phases closely.

PHASE 1

Inhaling, lift the right knee to the height of the chest and draw the heel to the right sit bone. To do the posture safely, we have to be able to touch the sit bone with the heel. This means that we have completely closed the gap between femur and tibia. Only then can the two bones move as a unity in the posture, which avoids any strain on the knee joint. If you cannot perform this movement, you should not attempt to go all the way into the posture, but concentrate instead on preparation. If you cannot completely close the knee joint you need to lengthen the quadriceps. Long quadriceps are also of great advantage in backbending.

PHASE 2

Pick up the right foot and, cradling it in both hands, point and invert it. Now direct the knee far out to the side. Gently draw the foot up into the *right* groin, with the knee still out to the side. This educates the hip to perform lateral rotation. The main prerequisite for the lotus and half-lotus postures is the ability to rotate the femur in the hip joint, and resistance may be encountered here. It is important to realise that the half-lotus and lotus postures belong to a group that involve hip rotation and not knee rotation. If we do not open the hip joints (which are ball-and-socket joints and move in all directions), the 'opening' will go into the knee joints. These are, however, hinge joints, designed to move

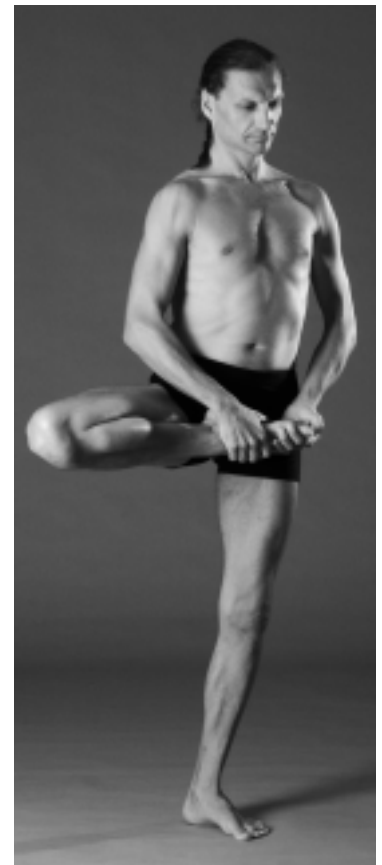
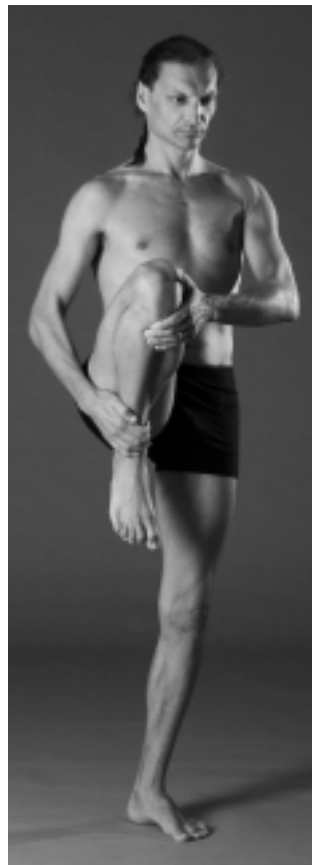
in only one direction. The 'opening' will be nothing but a destabilisation.

The ancient yogis had no problems in this area: they always sat on the floor, which keeps the hip joints mobile and flexible. In our society we sit in chairs off the floor and with the hip joints flexed. We therefore need to invest extra time into postures that prepare us for the Primary Series.

PHASE 3

From having the knee pointed far out to the right and the right heel in the right groin, we now lift the heel towards the navel, keeping foot and knee the same distance from the floor.

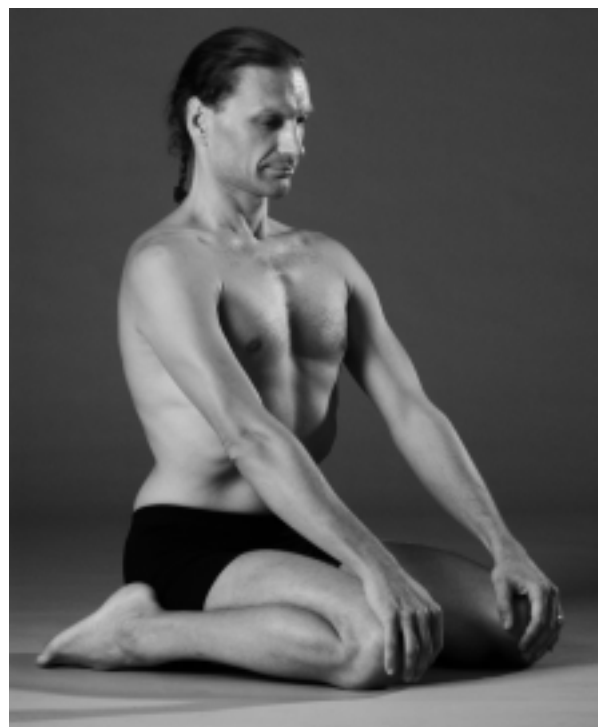
If you closed the gap between tibia and femur, both bones will now move as a unity, preventing any strain on the knee joint. I like to refer to this knee position as 'sealed'. It ensures that the rotation happens between the femur and its hip socket (acetabulum) and not between the femur and the tibia (knee joint). When you have acquired the necessary hip rotation, you will be able to touch your heel to your navel.



PHASE 4

Keeping the heel in line with the navel, let the knee slide down towards the floor. Ideally at this point we would medially rotate the femur to an extent that the previous lateral rotation is annulled, and the sole of the foot faces forward instead of upward. Lift the right foot into the opposite groin, making sure the heel stays in line with the navel. Keep hold of the foot with the left hand while the right hand reaches around your back for the left elbow. Bind the elbow or if possible the big toe of the right foot. Check that there is no limitation here from failing to lift the shoulder as the arm reaches back. Now draw the shoulder blade down the back.

Only when you have managed to bind the big toe with the opposite hand can you safely proceed to fold forward. The ability to bind indicates that the knee is in a safe position to fold forward. If the toe cannot be bound, the foot is probably not high enough in the groin but rather somewhere on the opposite thigh. This means that the knee joint is not flexed completely and the ligamentous structures and cartilage will be subject to stress.



PRACTICAL TIP

Lengthening the quadriceps

The easiest way to lengthen the quadriceps is to spend fifteen minutes or longer each day engaged in *Virasana* and, later, *Supta Virasana*. Do this outside of your *vinyasa* practice.

In the beginning you may sit on blankets or pillows. As flexibility increases, slowly reduce the height of your seat. After *Virasana* has become easy, practise *Supta Virasana*.

It is beneficial to use a belt in this posture. Without a belt the knees will have the tendency to come apart. Actively drawing the knees together every day for an extended period will shorten the adductor muscles.



From opposite page, left to right, going into *Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana* phase 1, phase 2, phase 3; *vinyasa* one Top, *Virasana*; above, *Supta Virasana*

PRACTICAL TIP

Opening the hip joints

To open the hip joints, we need to spend as much time as possible sitting in *Ardha Siddhasana*.

Practice this posture after *Virasana*. Again, blankets can be used and slowly decreased in height as your flexibility increases. Keep the knees as wide apart as possible. You can eat, write or watch TV in this posture. If one spends an hour in it daily, the hip joints will quickly open. After you have gained some flexibility, progress on to *Siddhasana*.

Vinyasa two

Exhaling, bend forward, keeping the big toe bound, and place the left hand on the floor alongside the left foot. Spread the fingers and point them forward. Spread the base of the toes of the standing leg. Gently shift a little more weight than that held in the heels forward into the base of the toes. Lift the inner arch of the foot away from the floor to protect the knee. Release the hip flexors and the buttocks (gluteus maximus) but work the supporting leg strongly (vastus group), eventually placing the chest squarely down on the leg. The crown of the head points downwards towards the floor. The shoulder blades are drawn up to the ceiling to keep the neck long.



Top, *Ardha Siddhasana*; above, *Siddhasana*



Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana, vinyasa two

The folded knee gently works towards the back end of the mat with a light medial rotation of the femur. To prevent the hip of the bent leg from sagging, keep this foot and leg active so there is an even tone in both legs. The angle between the two femurs should be 35°–45°, depending on the ratio of tibia to femur length. (People with a long shinbone need to



Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana, vinyasa three

have the knee lifted further out to the side to level the hips.) This action is performed by the abductor muscle group, especially the gluteus medius and gluteus minimus.

They are two very interesting muscles, as they are often the cause of a twisted pelvis if there is an imbalance between the two sides.

Stay in the state of *Ardha Baddha Padmottanasana* for five breaths.

PRACTICAL TIP

Bending the leg in transit

A trick for beginners to gain confidence is to bend the standing leg a little to reach the hand to the floor. When you have the hand securely on the floor, straighten the standing leg.

The same method can be used on the way up. The bent leg will help the other foot to slide deeper into the groin, with the bent leg more forgiving as you develop your sense of balance.

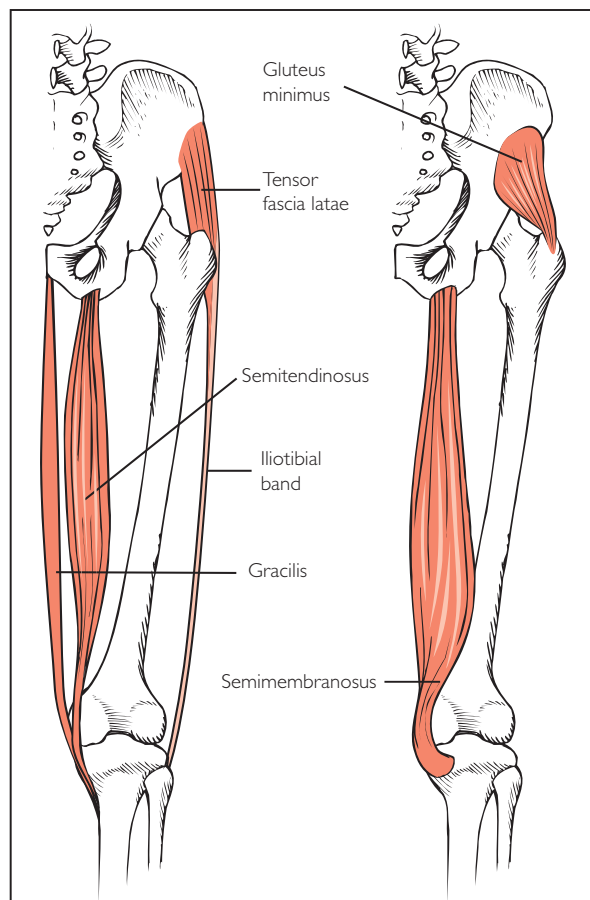
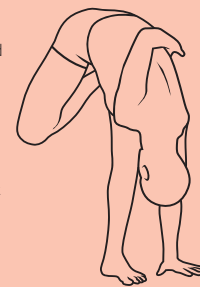


FIGURE 11 INTERNAL ROTATORS

The muscles that inwardly rotate the femur perform this action as a secondary function. The semimembranosus and semitendinosus, belonging to the hamstring group, are primarily hip extensors and knee flexors. The tensor fascia latae is primarily a hip flexor and an abductor. The main action of the gluteus minimus is abduction and that of the gracilis is adduction. Together these five muscles perform the medial rotation of the femur.

This function can most easily be observed when one lies on one's back and lets the feet turn out to the side. It is medial rotation of the femurs that brings the feet back together.



Vinyasa three

Inhaling, lift the torso and head and, maintaining the posture, exhale.

Vinyasa four

Inhaling, come up, but keep the half lotus bound until you are completely upright. This will draw the foot further up into the groin and increase the opening effect on the hip joint.