

the hips

Exploring the hips through different perspectives and Yoga traditions

Mia (left) and Ruth White (right) opening the hip in Pigeon pose

Many people are born with wide open hips and a great range of flexibility. Few of those who spend their lives sitting in chairs manage to retain this. Over time, the muscles and ligaments around the hip joint tighten and the range of motion is, at least temporarily, lost. Part of Yoga's purpose is to restore these hips to their full potential, allowing yogi/nis to sit comfortably in meditation.

Most forms of physical Yoga place a strong emphasis on the hips with postures focusing on opening, stretching and aligning this area. How people sit at their desks or watching television is, however, as important as what they do on their mats. Kino MacGregor, Ashtanga Yoga expert, recommends that if people want to commit to changing their hips, they should use them differently in their everyday lives. For

example, sitting on the floor more often or sitting cross-legged in a chair. Rather than only working on the hips for an hour or so in a Yoga class, making changes in daily activities can gently restore the hip joint in a long-lasting way. As Kino says, "If we start making changes in our everyday lives, that is when Yoga can be truly transformative".

Movements of the hips

"The hip joint is so large, there are so many things that affect it", says Hamish Hendry, a leading Ashtanga instructor in the UK, "every time you move your hip in Yoga it is opening in some way". People are often surprised to learn that the hips move in 6 different directions each of which can be worked on through Yoga. It is no wonder that it is sometimes difficult to figure out where the blockages are, let alone working through them!



Below: The ligaments of the hip joint are spiralled around the joint in normal upright position. When the leg bends forward (hip flexion) these ligaments unwind and so loosen the joint allowing for a high degree of forward flexion. On the other hand they are already relatively tight in standing, so when the leg goes back at the hip (hip extension) they spiral around the joint and tighten up even more, making the range of hip extension very small compared to flexion.

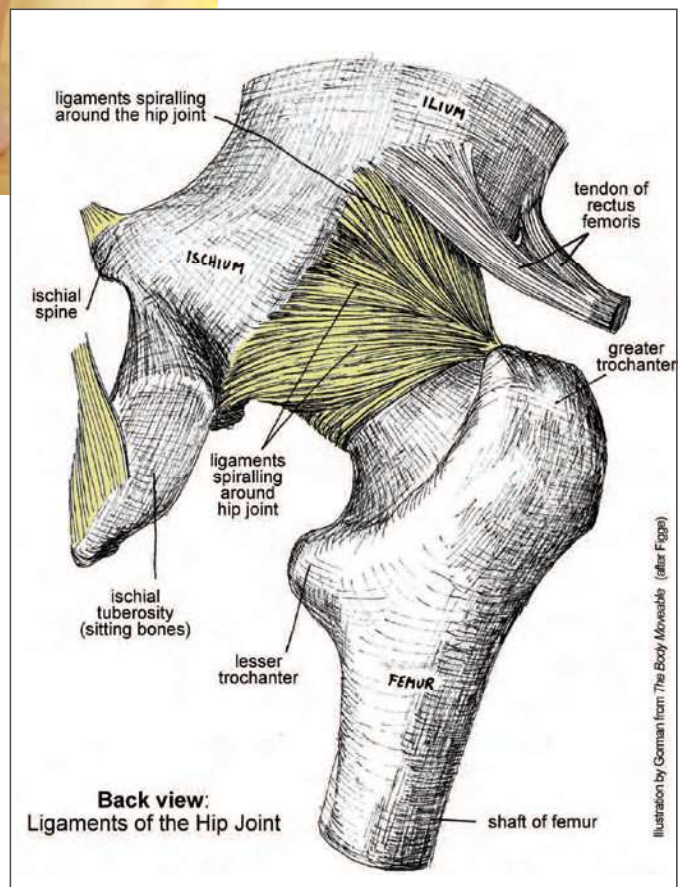
Mia (left) and Ruth White (right) demonstrate flexion of the hips with straight legs.

The hips are a phenomenal and complex joint stabilised by the joint capsule, connective tissues and 19 muscles surrounding the joint. They move, flex or rotate in the following directions:

- 1 Outwards, to the side (lateral or external rotation);
- 2 Inwards, towards the centre, (medial or internal rotation);
- 3 Backwards (extension or retroversion);
- 4 Towards the torso (flexion or anteversion);
- 5 Out to the side, away from the body (abduction); and
- 6 Inwards, towards the body (adduction).

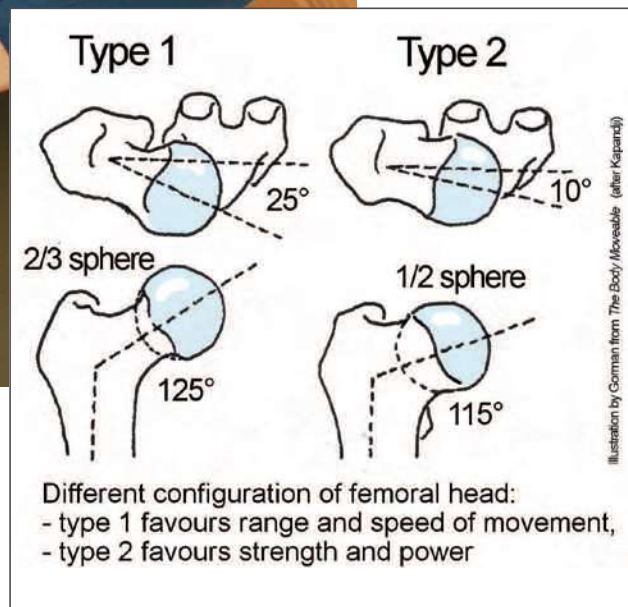
Paul Grilley, Yin Yoga and Anatomy expert, describes these movement beautifully in his anatomy DVD.

Aadil Palkhivala, Purna (Iyengar posture based) Yoga master, has developed a hip series designed to work on all of these directions. It will be published in his next book.





Mia demonstrates inward rotation, whilst Ruth demonstrates outwards rotation.



Ruth White demonstrates stretching the hip flexors over a back-arch (available from Ruth White)



Ruth White demonstrates the gentler variation.



Ruth White and Mia demonstrate how a gentler stretch to the hip flexors can be achieved with another person.

Limitations from the bones: Inward and outward rotation - different tribes?

Currently, the range of motion in our hips can be limited by our bones. Paul Grilley explains this in detail in his DVDs and generally divides people into one of two tribes: those who, because of their bones, find inward rotation easier and those with easier outward rotation. Paul's own teacher, Paulie Zink (founder of Yin Yoga) believes that with proper effort over long periods of time, people can 're-grow their bones'. Paul Grilley asserts that in the moment this does not matter and that it is helpful to people to be aware of the limitations of their bones.

Some people may naturally have bones with greater capacity for outer rotation than others. David Gorman's images demonstrate how the shape of the bones which make up the hip joint favour different attributes.
 To be continued ...

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