



## Diagonal Curl

The Diagonal Curl works primarily with releasing the external obliques, allowing the torso to twist and bend more freely. The exercise involves lying on one side with the knees bent and the upper body twisted open, curling up diagonally into the Side Curl position, then slowly releasing back out to the twisted open position.

### EXERCISE DESCRIPTION

**Starting Position:** Lie down on your left side. Bend your knees up in front of you at a 90 degree angle, as if you were setting up for the Side Curl. Lift up your right arm and bring your right hand to the back of your head, with your elbow pointing up toward the ceiling. Now, let your shoulders roll to the right so that your upper torso is twisting open and you're looking at the ceiling. Only twist as far as is comfortable. Your left arm can rest out to the left side, wherever it is comfortable.

**Curling Movement:** Inhale down into your belly, and then as you exhale, lift up your head and bring your right armpit closer to your right hip. As you lift up, you'll be turning toward the left so that you're looking straight ahead, like in the Side Curl. When you're ready, slowly release back out to the twisted open position. Release down as slowly and with as much control as you possibly can. Repeat one or two more times.

**When you're done, practice this movement on the other side.**

### ANATOMY OF THE DIAGONAL CURL

The Diagonal Curl primarily works with the *external obliques* on the working side. The external obliques rotate the spine to the opposite side, so they will contract in the curl up, and release on the way down.

The *pectoralis major* on the working side will also engage in the curl up, and release on the way down.

The *rectus abdominis* will engage to assist in flexing the torso forward in the curl up, and it will release on the way down.

The *internal obliques* rotate the spine to the same side. So, the internal obliques on the supporting side (the side that is resting on the floor) will engage in the curl up, and release on the way down.

**Breathing in the Diagonal Curl:** Students should begin by inhaling down into their lower belly, then exhaling as they curl up. After exhaling and curling up, they can breathe as needed until they have released back down to their open starting position.

## CONDITIONS HELPED BY THE DIAGONAL CURL

The Diagonal Curl addresses the following conditions by releasing involuntary muscle contraction in the obliques, abdominals, and pectorals.

Scoliosis

Shoulder tightness and pain

Frozen shoulder

Thoracic Outlet Syndrome

Hyperkyphosis/Rounded shoulders

Neck tightness and pain

Shallow breathing

Tightness in the abdominals and related issues (digestion, elimination)

## HOW TO TEACH THE DIAGONAL CURL

**Get the student in their starting position.** The student should lie down on their left side and get into the same starting position as for the Side Curl, with their knees bent up in front of them at 90 degrees. They should bring their right hand up behind their head, with their right elbow pointed toward the ceiling. Then they can gently let their right shoulder and arm lower out to the right side, twisting open only as far as they can go comfortably. They can rest their left arm out to the left side wherever it is comfortable for them. Their knees may slide apart slightly as they turn open to the right; that is fine.

**Invite the student to close their eyes.** Closing their eyes removes all the visual information that their brain would otherwise have to process. Keeping the eyes closed allows the student to focus completely on their internal sensations.

**Teach the Diagonal Curl.** While the student is resting in their starting position, instruct them to take a full inhale down into their belly. Then as they slowly exhale, the student should curl up diagonally, as if they want to bring their right armpit closer to their right hip. They should turn toward the left as they curl up, so that in their fully curled up position they are facing forward as they do in the Side Curl. As they curl up, you can cue the student to be aware of the contraction of their external obliques on

their right side. When the student is ready, they can release back out to their open starting position as slowly as they possibly can. As they slowly release, they should feel the diagonal from the front of their right shoulder down across their abdominals gently elongating. They should release fully, as far as is comfortable, and rest for a few seconds before beginning the next curl. The student can repeat the exercise one or two more times. Ask them to notice if they can feel themselves releasing a little farther each time.

### **Consideration:**

When teaching this exercise, remember that the nervous system will best remember the last thing that it learned. Notice if your student tends to rotate or round forward more to one side. For example, if your student's right shoulder is rounded forward and their rib cage and shoulder girdle are rotated toward the left, you should teach them the Diagonal Curl starting with their left side as their working side. It will feel easier for them to do the movement with their left side, and thus will be easier for them to learn it correctly and feel how it should be felt. Then they can do the exercise with their right side, and notice how it might feel different than it did on the left. They will have learned what the movement should feel like, and they can then apply that knowledge to working with their tighter and less coordinated right side. And in doing the right side second, the release that they feel on their right side will be more likely to stick with them.

If you determine that it would be beneficial for your student to practice the right and left sides in a certain order, instruct your student to do so at home, and explain to them why it is important.

### **Common mistakes:**

The most common mistake is not releasing completely to the open position, resting for a few seconds, and allowing the nervous system to sense the release of the muscles. Remind your student of the importance of releasing and relaxing completely in between each repetition.

Your student may also rush into the Curl without first taking a full inhale. Remind your student that incorporating their breath is an important aspect of this movement. Fully inhaling before beginning the movement, then fully exhaling as they curl up will enhance the movement. Also, incorporating deep lower belly breathing into the exercises teaches the nervous system how to breathe deeply, fully, and naturally while moving.

Counting can help the student to move slowly enough as they release out of the Curl. You can suggest counting to eight (or more) as they release back down to neutral to make sure they are moving slowly enough.

**The following is an example of how I teach the Diagonal Curl:**

Come down to the floor, and lie down on your left side. Bend your knees up in front of you at a 90 degree angle, just as if you were setting up for the Side Curl. Lift up your right arm and bring your right hand to the back of your head, and have your elbow pointing up toward the ceiling. Now, gently let your shoulders roll to the right so that your upper torso is twisting open and you're looking at the ceiling. Just twist as far as is comfortable.

Take an inhale into your lower belly, and as you exhale, start lifting your head up and bringing your right armpit closer to your right hip. As you lift up, you'll be turning to the left so that you're looking straight ahead, like in the Side Curl. But now as you release, you'll be releasing back out to that open position. Release down as slowly and with as much control as you possibly can.

You can do this movement a total of three times. Always start with an inhale down into your lower belly, then exhale as you lift up. Then, release down as slowly and as smoothly as you possibly can. As you release, feel the muscles across your abdomen and chest gently releasing and getting longer.

Now, roll onto your back, stretch your legs out if you want to, and completely relax. As you're resting, notice if your right side and your left side feel different in any way.

Now roll onto your right side, and bend your knees up in front of you at a 90 degree angle, just as if you were setting up for the Side Curl. Lift up your left arm and bring your left hand to the back of your head, and have your elbow pointing up toward the ceiling. Now, gently let your shoulders roll to the left so that your upper torso is twisting open and you're looking at the ceiling. Just twist as far as is comfortable.

(Teach the movement with the left side.)