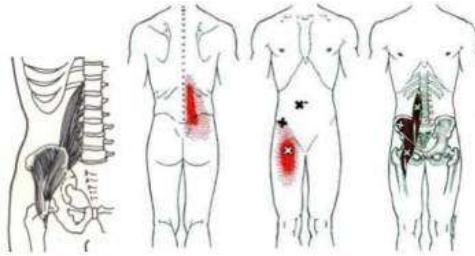


## The Psoas Muscle

### Why it's a Big Deal and How to Take Care of It



The Psoas muscle (pronounced so-as) is the deepest muscle of the human body affecting our structural balance, muscular integrity, flexibility, strength, range of motion, joint mobility, and organ functioning.

Growing out of both sides of the spine, the psoas spans laterally from the 12th thoracic vertebrae (T12) to each of the 5 lumbar vertebrae. From there it flows down through the abdominal core, the pelvis, to attach to the top of the femur (thigh) bone.

The Psoas is the only 'muscle' to connect the spine to the legs. It is responsible for holding us upright, and allows us to lift our legs in order to walk. A healthy functioning psoas stabilizes the spine and provides support through the trunk, forming a shelf for the vital organs of the abdominal core.

But there's more: author, teacher and body worker Liz Koch has researched the psoas and how it affects us emotionally. In fact, she gives seminars around the world that focus on releasing and healing the psoas. Koch writes that the psoas is connected to the diaphragm through connective tissue or fascia which affects both our breath and fear reflex. She believes that our fast paced modern lifestyle (which runs on the adrenaline of our sympathetic nervous system) chronically triggers and tightens the psoas – making it literally ready to run or fight. The psoas helps you to spring into action – or curl you up into a protective ball.

If we constantly contract the psoas to due to stress or tension , the muscle eventually begins to shorten leading to a host of painful conditions including low back pain, sacroiliac pain, sciatica, disc problems, spondylolysis, scoliosis, hip degeneration, knee pain, menstruation pain, infertility, and digestive problems.

A tight psoas not only creates structural problems, it constricts the organs, puts pressure on nerves, interferes with the movement of fluids, and impairs diaphragmatic breathing.

In fact, "The psoas is so intimately involved in such basic physical and emotional reactions, that a chronically tightened psoas continually signals your body that you're in danger, eventually exhausting the adrenal glands and depleting the immune system."

And according to Koch, this situation is exacerbated by many things in our modern lifestyle, from car seats to constrictive clothing, from chairs to shoes that distort our posture, curtail our natural movements and further constrict our psoas.

Koch believes the first step in cultivating a healthy psoas is to release unnecessary tension. But "to work *with* the psoas is not to try to control the muscle, but to cultivate the awareness necessary for sensing its messages. This involves making a conscious choice to become somatically aware."

There are many ways to stretch and relax your psoas. I have included just a couple. You can do an internet search on the psoas and find all kind of information!

### The Most Popular Psoas Stretch



Get down in a lunge position with your knee on the ground. Use something for cushioning like a blanket or a pillow, if needed. Now squeeze the glute of the rear leg and imagine driving the knee back and into the ground, while having the hip sink down and forward. Brace your abs, as if you're bracing for a punch. Don't let your abs protrude outwards, but work to stabilize your pelvis with your core musculature. Don't let the pelvis tilt forward. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat 4 times as long as you feel no pain.

You can move your rear leg back as you go deeper into the stretch, but you can also keep both feet stationary and just let the hip sink down and forward. Remember the following though:

- Keep your back straight and vertical
- Keep your hips squared up
- Keep the glute of the working leg tight

In other words: you must not lean forward or tilt your hip to the side or let your back round. You can place one hand at the lower back (see picture), so that you can tell how well you're contracting the glute and whether your back is rounding. To get an even better stretch, laterally flex your body in the opposite direction of the side you're stretching.

### Lying Down Stretch



Stretching your psoas muscle lying down can be done on the floor, but it works best on the edge of a training table or bed. Lie on your back toward the lower end of a table so that your buttocks is at the edge. Allow one leg to hang off the edge as you grab the other knee with both hands. Pull your knee toward your chest as far as you can and hold this for 20 seconds. Repeat the stretch four times as long as you feel no pain.