

body divine yoga

The Psoas: Muscle of The Soul

POSTED ON MARCH 23, 2011 BY DANIELLE PROHOM OLSON

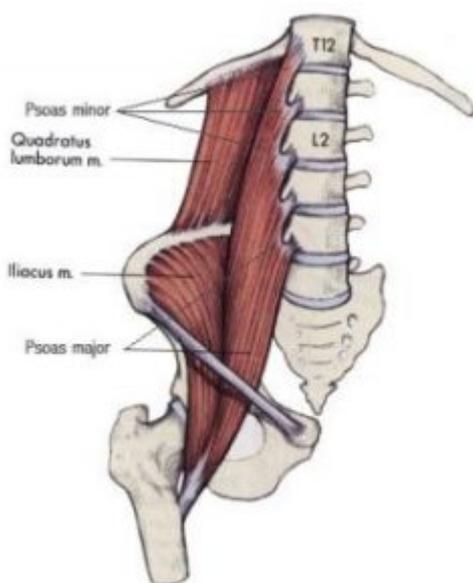
83

I was delighted when I first came across Liz Koch's (<http://www.coreawareness.com/about/>) amazing work because it confirmed much of what I'd been intuiting on my own. I had begun to open and close my yoga practise with hip opening poses with the specific intention of releasing tension in my psoas and hip flexors. I'd breathe and imagine tension flowing out of constricted muscles to be released as energy into the torso.

It worked, I'd feel my body soften yet somehow grow stronger.

Reading Liz Koch I instantly realized what I was doing – by learning to relax my psoas I was literally energizing my deepest core by reconnecting with the powerful energy of the earth. According to Koch, the psoas is far more than a core stabilizing muscle; it is an organ of perception composed of bio-intelligent tissue and “literally embodies our deepest urge for survival, and more profoundly, our elemental desire to flourish.”

Well, I just had to learn more. Here is just a sprinkling of the research (<http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/170>) that Liz Koch and others have uncovered regarding the importance of the psoas to our health, vitality and emotional well-being.



(<http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/psoas52.jpg>) 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.

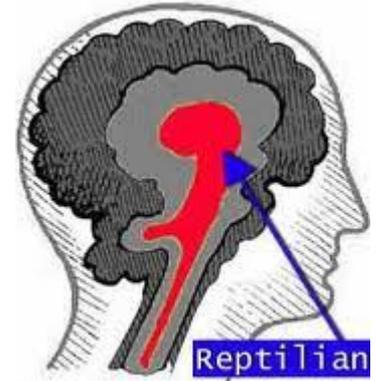
The Psoas is the only ‘muscle’ to connect the spine to the legs. It is responsible for holding us upright, and allows us to lift our legs in order to walk. A healthily

functioning psoas stabilizes the spine and provides support through the trunk, forming a shelf for the vital organs of the abdominal core.

both our breath and fear reflex. This is because the psoas is directly linked to the re

(<http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03>

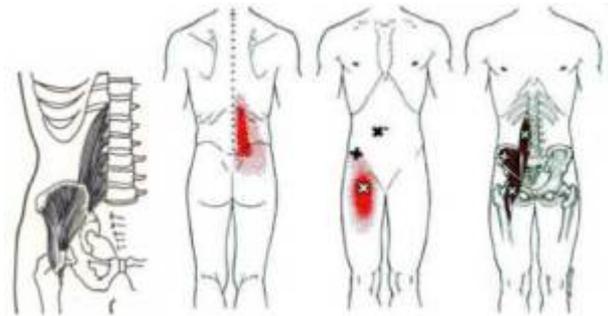
[/reptilebrain2.jpg](http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/reptilebrain2.jpg))ptilian brain, the most ancient interior part of the brain stem and spinal cord. As Koch writes “Long before the spoken word or the organizing capacity of the cortex developed, the reptilian brain, known for its survival instincts, maintained our essential core functioning.”



Koch 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 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.

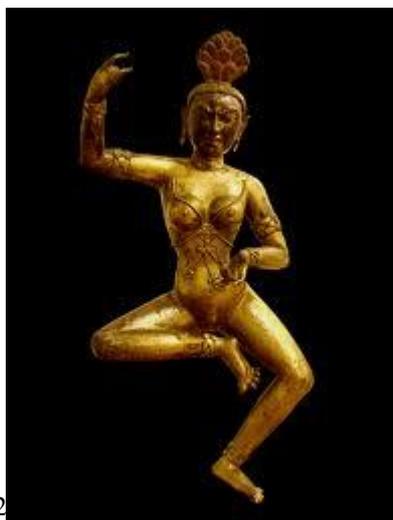
(<http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/psoas21.jpg>)A tight psoas not only creates structural problems, it constricts the organs, puts pressure on nerves, interferes with the movement of fluids, and impairs diaphragmatic breathing.



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.”

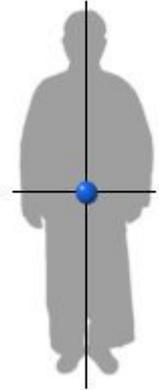


(<http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03>

[/dakini3.jpg](http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/dakini3.jpg)) A relaxed psoas is the mark of play and creative expression. Instead of the contracted psoas, ready to run or fight, the relaxed and released psoas is ready instead to lengthen and open, to dance. In many yoga poses (like tree) the thighs can’t fully rotate outward unless the psoas releases. A released psoas allows the front of the thighs to lengthen and the leg to move independently from the pelvis, enhancing and deepening the lift of the entire torso and heart.

Koch believes that by cultivating a healthy psoas, we can rekindle our body’s vital energies by learning to reconnect with the life force of the universe. Within the Taoist tradition the

psoas is spoken of as the seat or muscle of the soul, and sur (<http://bodydivineyoga.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/dantien1.jpg>) rounds the lower "Dan tien" a major energy center of body. A flexible and strong psoas grounds us and allows subtle energies to flow through the bones, muscles and joints.



Koch writes "The psoas, by conducting energy, grounds us to the earth, just as a grounding wire prevents shocks and eliminates static on a radio. Freed and grounded, the spine can awaken"..." As gravitational flows transfer weight through bones, tissue, and muscle, into the earth, the earth rebounds, flowing back up the legs and spine, energizing, coordinating and animating posture, movement and expression. It is an uninterrupted conversation between self, earth, and cosmos."

So, it might be worth it, next time you practice, to tune in and pay attention to what your bio-intelligent psoas has to say.

POSTED IN [THE BODY DIVINE](#)

83 thoughts on "The Psoas: Muscle of The Soul"

1. [Carol Horton](#)

[DECEMBER 7, 2011 AT 10:33 PM](#)

Very interesting post. Makes a lot of sense to me. Thanks.

[Reply](#)

◦ [Danielle Prohom Olson](#)

[DECEMBER 8, 2011 AT 6:36 PM](#)

Thanks to you! I am a big fan. Your writing is always an inspiration...

[Reply](#)

2. [Robyn](#)

[JUNE 27, 2012 AT 4:16 AM](#)

Can you please elaborate on the "direct" connection from the psoas to the reptilian brain? Thanks!

[Reply](#)

◦ [Danielle Prohom Olson](#)

[JUNE 27, 2012 AT 3:22 PM](#)

Hi there, I encourage you to investigate the work of [Liz Koch](#) who has written extensively regarding the connection of the psoas with the flight/ fight survival response and reptilian brain....she is fascinating!

[Reply](#)

◦ [Barb Geir](#)

[APRIL 12, 2013 AT 2:40 AM](#)

It sounds to me like the psoas connects to the reptilian brain because of its connection to the diaphragm. If those connective tissues are tight, that could lead to a stronger/ faster flight/ fight response. Please note, I said it could. I do not know this for a fact.

Reply◦ *Karl*APRIL 17, 2013 AT 6:20 AM

Two problems with this – firstly, the ‘reptilian brain’ or basal ganglia are present in all modern vertebrates, whose common ancestor lived around 500 million years ago and long before the evolution of either reptiles or mammals, and secondly, the diaphragm is a structure found in mammals and not in reptiles (although crocodiles and their kin have a similar structure). The concept of the reptilian brain is no longer taken seriously by scientists, who are increasingly recognising that there are far fewer differences between the brains of the various vertebrate groups.

3. *Cheryl7487pratt12*JUNE 28, 2012 AT 2:07 AM

Great post. I found Liz’s work via internet several years ago too. Most of my classes have some element of psoas release work. David Burcelli’s work is great too...of course he studied with Ms. Koch. I cant wait to read more of your blog.

Namaste

Reply4. *jen*JUNE 28, 2012 AT 4:19 PM

Whoa! And now I understand why I’m having trouble opening my front body into camel pose! I always thought it was my quads. What a beautiful post- thank you for sharing!

Reply5. *MaryAnn Reynolds*JUNE 29, 2012 AT 1:00 AM

Reblogged this on The Well: bodymindheartspirit and commented:

Just discovered this blog and post on the psoas muscle, one of the deepest muscles in the body as well as the most fascinating.

Reply6. *Susie Stephen (@longrunyoga)*JUNE 29, 2012 AT 11:31 PM

Thanks for posting! The psoas is so important for runners too! Looking forward to delving into the research now!

Reply7. Pingback: Breaking Records8. *Amy Burnett*JUNE 30, 2012 AT 2:30 AM

Powerful clarity about the psoas!

Reply9. *michelle*JULY 3, 2012 AT 3:32 PM

do you offer any suggestions on poses that would relax the psoas?

Reply◦ *Danielle Prohom Olson*JULY 3, 2012 AT 4:43 PM

My personal favourite to begin practice is Apanasana (reclining alternate knee-to-chest)

pose). Start with bent leg on floor, then move into straightening the leg after you feel the psoas has released as far it will go. Teamed with slow deep breathing, I can literally feel the psoas release and lengthen in this posture. The trick, of course, is NEVER to force, but to encourage relaxation. Breathe into the psoas, hold at least 30 seconds – if not longer. I also love squat (Malasana or Garland) and reclined Cobbler.....for more info here is an article written by Liz Koch for Yoga Journal.....<http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/169/>

Reply

o *Michelle*

JULY 9, 2012 AT 1:24 AM

thanks so much!

10. *compassionyoga*

JULY 8, 2012 AT 6:59 AM

Reblogged this on compassionyoga.

Reply

11. *Rob Martin*

JULY 9, 2012 AT 9:59 AM

Dr. Rolf thought the psoas was the most important muscle in the body.

Reply

12. *Lucy*

JULY 15, 2012 AT 10:54 AM

brilliant, thank you – I'll be sharing this a lot

Reply

13. *Dr. Dale H. Powers*

JULY 20, 2012 AT 5:14 AM

Great information....Understanding the mechanics of the spine and the proprioceptors that are monitoring movement....how the emotions play a part in the reaction to fear (kidneys related to psoas)...the constant check and balance of the diaphragm to the psoas and/or the psoas to the diaphragm...Sacroiliac joint unstable creates muscles attempting to protect/guard...Psoas plays a major role here...leads to compressive forces on the spine (discs then wear)...Let alone the cranial aspect of temporal bones related to the ilia and the occiput to the sacrum (see Dr. DeJarnette, D.O., Sacro-occipital Technique)...All great information...Your sharing leads to more people understanding and therefore making conscious choices to enhance their lives...Blessings....Dr. Powers

Reply

14. *Patrick Bridgeman*

FEBRUARY 4, 2013 AT 3:50 PM

Reblogged this on Patrick Bridgeman.

Reply

15. *Shackled and Crowned*

FEBRUARY 4, 2013 AT 4:01 PM

This is fantastic information!

Reply

16. *Buster Maxwell*

FEBRUARY 8, 2013 AT 6:52 AM

Wonderful article...I have passed it on to some of my favorite bodyworkers ;) Dr. Powers, your post was enlightening as well! May the blessings be... *

Reply

17. Pingback: The Psoas: Muscle of The Soul | Joi Dupre, LMT: Therapeutic Massage

18. candacerusling

FEBRUARY 9, 2013 AT 6:22 AM

Reblogged this on Beyond My Mat and commented:

A great blog post that I really enjoyed today.

Reply

19. inkazar

FEBRUARY 9, 2013 AT 2:16 PM

I don't know how I stumbled on this post but I was meant to. This answers some nearly lifelong questions for me about my spine & general health. Thank you.

Reply

20. Dr. John Faherty

FEBRUARY 10, 2013 AT 1:22 PM

love this article and your blog as well. I am always amazed when patients who release the tension in their psoas, suddenly can do all those things they could not do. I am now shifting my chiropractic services to animals and will be excited to see the role this important muscle has on the quadruped locomotion and spine.

Reply

21. Markku Tunninen MD, Psychiatrist

FEBRUARY 12, 2013 AT 11:46 PM

Thank you for a great presentation of psoas!

It's easy to agree your post,

but I would like to add, and further emphasizes the importance of the psoas even at the function or dysfunction of the upper lumbar nerve roots which are forming, after leaving nerve root foramens, lumbar plexus within the psoas.

The lumbar nerve plexus is formed by the intercommunication of the anterior divisions of the upper four lumbar nerves and a communicating branch from the anterior division of the last thoracic nerve, the dorsi lumbar nerve.

The psoas major is divided into a superficial and deep part. The deep part originates from the transverse processes of lumbar vertebrae I-V. The superficial part originates from the lateral surfaces of the last thoracic vertebra, lumbar vertebrae I-IV, and from neighboring intervertebral discs. The lumbar plexus lies between the two layers.

The lumbar plexus is placed in front of the transverse processes of the lumbar vertebrae (origin points of the psoas), but what's important the lumbar plexus is placed and descending to pelvis within the substance of the psoas major muscle, between the superficial and deep part of the psoas.

A branch from the fourth lumbar and the fifth lumbar nerves form the lumbosacral trunk, which connects with the sacral plexus.

ilioinguinal nerve, the genitofemoral nerve, the lateral femoral cutaneous nerve, the femoral nerve, the obturator nerve, and the accessory nerve. The accessory nerve is only in about 10% of people. The ilioinguinal nerves are derived from the first lumbar nerve and a branch from the twelfth thoracic nerve. The genitofemoral nerve is derived from the first and second lumbar nerves. The lateral femoral nerve cutaneous nerve is derived from the second and third lumbar nerves. The obturator and femoral nerves are derived from the second, third, and fourth lumbar nerves. The accessory nerve is derived from the third or fourth lumbar nerves.

So psoas role is very important and a challenging one at functional diagnostics and rehabilitation.

Reply

22. [natamiraj](#)

MARCH 5, 2013 AT 9:06 AM

Reblogged this on [natamiraj](#) and commented:
YES!!! This is proven Liz.

Reply

23. [buddhimind](#)

MARCH 19, 2013 AT 3:28 AM

Thanks for a simple, informative and educational post. I will be sharing this.
Namaste

Reply

24. [David Scott Lynn \(dslyoga\)](#)

MARCH 19, 2013 AT 5:05 PM

Excellent Article, Danielle. ... I've only today come across your blog for the first time, and so far, I'm very impressed.

I'd like to add three things to your psoas article...

Yet I'd like to preface by saying the below points are not terribly critical for someone who is reasonably healthy, with few or no structural, neuromuscular or myofascial issues. If a person IS having such chronic problems, however, it becomes more important to be more specific in one's approach to psoas:

1.) A lot of resistance to lengthening psoas actually comes from the iliacus muscles, which parallel the psoas and have the same attachment in the femur. Yet above, iliacus only crosses the hip joint, attaching to the inner bowl of the pelvis, and not the spine. That's important because if you're employing any kind of visualization to release across the front of the hip region, or using manual self-treatment in conjunction (or working with a therapist), then you need to expand your focus wider to the entire pelvic bowl, to include the iliacus. That's because the iliacus sort of "fills" the entire inner pelvic bowl out toward the sides of the hips. So it often needs attention as well.

Yes, iliacus will *tend* to stretch, release & lengthen when you're doing the same with psoas, yet being more conscious of iliacus working in concert with psoas helps a lot.

2.) Much psoas tension is the result of the psoas attempting to stabilize the pelvis against over-shortening of the hip extensors (gluteal & hamstring muscles) and the lumbar flexors (rectus abdominus & obliques). As those muscles chronically shorten (which happens a lot in sitting or running, for just two examples) and therefore attempt to tuck the pelvis under (rotating posteriorly, one of THE WORST things most people can do), the psoas contracts

to stabilize and/or counteract that pelvic tucking.

So, while the psoas might very well be causing a lot of problems, sometimes the best therapeutic strategy is to thoroughly release the hip extensors & lumbar flexors first, THEN go for the psoas. Actually, many times, the psoas will substantially let go of its own tensions when the above mentioned muscles start to relax & lengthen. So it's often a LOT easier.

Unaddressed tension in those muscles can also explain why a person's psoas (and iliacus too!) keep tightening up over and over again. Sometimes, in more extreme situations, releasing the psoas without addressing the other muscles will actually make a person WORSE because the over-shortened psoas has been keeping the spine from traveling too far to the rear. Now the spine goes WAY back, so the unaddressed muscles tighten up even more, and the psoas now tightens up EVEN MORE, compounding the pressures in the lumbar and hip regions!

3.) A lot of people mistakenly believe the psoas creates lumbar lordosis. (Then they often call too much lordosis "swayback" which is, ironically, a misuse of a slang term, leading to a lot of misdiagnoses.) I think this is VERY incorrect. The psoas does anteriorly (forward) tilt the pelvis, which, all other things being equal, COULD cause the lumbar spine to curve forward. However, if you look at a profile or side view of the psoas, you'll see that when psoas contracts, it actually shortens across the vertebrae, pulling each vertebrae towards each other, compressing the discs (as mentioned by Dr. Powers, in an above comment). This has the effect of REDUCING lumbar curve (causing "flat-back," or lumbar kyphosis), not increasing it (which would be lumbar lordosis, and increase in lumbar curve).

OKAY, just thought all that should be made clear.

BTW, I read Liz's book, and was at a seminar she taught at the old Transitions bookstore in Chicago many years ago, and my recollection is those points were not specifically made, so, there you go.

Thanks for Reading,
David Scott Lynn

Reply

- *Danielle Prohom Olson*
MARCH 19, 2013 AT 5:18 PM
And thanks to you David!

Reply

- *Dominic*
APRIL 24, 2013 AT 6:47 PM
Hey David,

Is it possible for the psoas to one to feel like they are walking on a boat dock? I am asking because my Physical Therapist is treating me for what we believe is Cervicogenic Vertigo. Although some of the dry needling he has done in my neck and upper throacic area are helping, I still have this issue where when I try to do anterior and posterior pelvic tilting (basically and to put it crudely "humping") I get this wave of unsteadiness through my body. Almost like a nausea accompanied with a feeling as though I'm walking on a boat dock. This also occurs when I'm walking on changing elevation patterns (like our ergonomic floormats at work) or just brushing my teeth (which also causes pelvic movement).

I am also asking because when I tried to do a psoas release by laying flat on my back for thirty minutes, my legs began to tremble, shake, and spasm. The spasm mostly seemed to come from my inner thigh.

I know what you tell me is not a confirmed diagnosis, but could you please send your thoughts?

Thank-you so very much...

Dominic

Reply

◦ Jenny Blyth

APRIL 24, 2013 AT 10:47 PM

Hi Dominic.

I don't know about the boat dock feeling, but contracted Psoas can feel like you are 'walking in the wind'. Nausea is a common response and also indicator of Psoas contraction. The trembling and shaking of the inner thighs is a very healthy trauma release and it is okay to allow it to express for an amount of time that you feel comfortable with the sensation. You may find it lessens over time. Chronic psoas contraction can be from accumulation of undissipated charge is held in the body after a traumatic encounter/s.

◦ David Scott Lynn

APRIL 25, 2013 AT 1:27 AM

Hi Dominic! Well, I must confess that even after 30 years of doing therapy, people STILL show up that even though they have particular symptoms that LOOK like it should be "whatever" causing it, people still present with new and unusual or at least different stuff. So, without actually working with you, this is NOT an easy thing. ... But you knew that, right?

So yes, psoas can have a VERY direct effect on the neck muscles, and then, in turn, nerves in the neck. If the psoas muscles are pulling hard enough, it makes NO difference what you do to the neck, the psoas will just keep pulling it back out of whack.

Psoas will definitely affect or restrict pelvic tilting. It will definitely cause or contribute to nausea. I can cause vertigo. And psoas attaches high up in the inner thigh, but more importantly, has strong affect on the femoral nerve, which controls the muscles in the front half of and inner thigh.

I know all that first hand, or first body, BTW, because I had all that stuff a few years ago.

What I would do to help me is lie flat on my back, but with a BIG bolster under my knees. That puts slack into the psoas, allowing it to stay more relaxed.

Whether you or a friend or a therapist, you or they can then VERY gently and slowly apply steady finger pressure on your abdominal muscles, just above the inguinal ligament, along the lateral line of the rectus abdominus.

You're actually going in along the vertical line of fascia between the edge of the rectus abdominus and the oblique muscles.

The trick is to use slow, steady pressure, sinking in, but NO side-to side or rubbing movement. NO cross-fiber or stroking or strumming or gliding. Just hold steady, slow, gentle pressure on the muscle and WAIT for it to relax & release. You might have to wait a while for the abdominal wall muscles to release first, which might have its own benefits anyway. And this allows you to sink down toward the psoas. When you've felt a substantial amount of release, slowly lift up your fingers, move up an inch or two, and start over again. Do this in at least three or four points along the muscle, then do the other one.

As you make progress, use smaller bolsters under the knees until you can lie flat with no problem. But take your time, if you can.

People who say psoas is painful to work on are just going in WAY too big of a hurry, and usually trying to "get to the psoas" without waiting for the AB wall to release first. ... Just remember, NO pain means MORE gain. Yes, it takes more time, but it is worth it.

In case you're not sure where the psoas muscles are, I went through the first five pages on Google to try and find the best illustrations of psoas:

This is the most complete, with some commentary that might serve to confuse you. If so, let me know, or just look at the pictures:

http://www.massagetherapy.com/articles/index.php/article_id/497/The-Opinionated-Psoas-Part-1

Here is an animation that looks better than it actually is, but is pretty good:

http://www.bandhayoga.com/keys_psoas.html

If you're not sure about the abdominal wall, try here:

http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://antranik.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/muscles-of-the-abdominal-wall.jpg&imgrefurl=http://antranik.org/muscles-of-the-abdominal-wall/&h=381&w=580&sz=117&tbnid=U782ysgt2X11JM:&tbnh=85&tbnw=130&zoom=1&usq=D8YQVLD2INP0ccJfi3luHjl6Mns=&docid=V8r5C1_00HQgQM&sa=X&ei=hoR4UYb7E8aF2gWZ2ID4CQ&ved=0CDkO9QEwAQ&dur=2172

Let us know how it goes.
David

- *Dominic*
APRIL 25, 2013 AT 4:20 PM
Jenny and David,

Thank-you so much for the feedback. David, thank-you so much for the recommendations. I will definitely try what you have suggested and I am hoping i get some relief. I am a little worried about digging into the psoas myself because I do not know what I am doing. However, I will look at the illustrations and see if I can rack up the courage to give it a shot.

it didn't feel as though it held enough tension to cause an issue. However, he did say the right side was slightly more tense than the left.

Thank-you so much for your time and I will try this when I get off of work tonight!

Sincerely,

Dominic

o David Scott Lynn

APRIL 25, 2013 AT 9:04 PM

Hi Dominic! Good Luck. ... But when you say "Dig In," I get worried. Don't "dig in," just gently, slowly softly "explore" that area. I've worked on some people's psoas muscles with the tip of my elbow, and I was in there 20 minutes or so, on each psoas! But you can bet there was quite a bit of time waiting for the AB muscles to relax before I sank in. The reasons I used elbow is it's a larger surface area. Fingers can wear out faster than the elbow.

RE: Not feeling "tight" ... I've had clients tell me their physical therapists told them certain muscles felt perfectly normal to the PT. But to me, they were some of the tightest muscles in the person's body! And that's what fixed the problem. ... So, "tight" can be a VERY subjective term.

Also, there are multiple layers of psoas. It takes quite a bit of time to get to the deeper layers, so don't be too sure what you'll find till you've been down in there. Psoas muscles do NOT need to "feel really tight" to the touch to be causing a problem. And they are actually kind of wide, but they are kind of at an angle. So what you feel pressing straight in can be misleading.

OKAY, I have to say this: PLEASE try to do a thorough stretching of your hamstrings and gluteal muscles first. If you release psoas too much before releasing ABs and the gluteal/hamstring groups, it can throw your back further OUT of whack.

So, if you are a thorough person, do this in circular phases, a little at a time. Stretch gluteals/hamstrings, stretch the ABs, then manually release the ABs, then sink deeper down into the psoas muscles. THEN, after you've felt SOME release in psoas, roll over and do something like a gentle cobra, but use all arm strength, not your back muscles. Then, slowly move around, then get up, and see how it feels. If anything feels worse, go for a slow, gentle walk till things normalize. Then later on, repeat the entire process.

But I've had days where I was so sick I could barely function, including the vertigo thing, and — literally — ten minutes of working on my ABs and psoas, and I was 100% recovered.

So please take it slow and easy, not in a big hurry.

Again, Good Luck,
David

o Dominic

APRIL 27, 2013 AT 1:29 PM

David,

Thank-you so much for the points. I read your post about releasing the hip extensors and lumbar flexors first and I have been working on stretching them. The reason being that I was told that a lot of this issue is coming from a neuromuscular issue in my thoracic area. Since you recommended for those with neuromuscular issues to release the other muscles first, I have been working on it. Thank-you so much.

I apologize for my terminological use of the phrase “dig-in”. I just meant try to grab the task by both hands and give it a shot despite my fear of doing so. I will look for gluteal and ab release/stretch techniques right now before I start this morning.

Thank-you so much for your help... I genuinely cannot thank you enough.

Sincerely,

Dominic

◦ *Dominic*

APRIL 27, 2013 AT 1:42 PM

David,

If I may ask one more question, would the Constructive Rest position work for me? I am just very afraid of harming myself performing the active release. Keep in mind, I am pretty ignorant when it comes to what I can and cannot anatomically harm during this process. Here is a web page displaying the constructive rest position (I'm sure you already know what it is):

<http://www.vlmassage.com/psoas.html>

Thank-you so much,

Dominic

◦ *David Scott Lynn*

APRIL 27, 2013 AT 3:00 PM

Hi Again, Dominic!

Well, Constructive Rest (CR) pose can be helpful, UP TO A POINT, but has some issues with it. The first thing to remember about CR pose is that when your knees are up like that, whether on your back or on your side, the psoas muscle is in a SHORTENED state! Yet you want to LENGTHEN the muscles, reducing its chronically increased Resting Tonus. So there's a paradox. (I consider Resting Tonus to be the big problem in what I call C.E.M.&.N.T. or Chronic, Excess Muscle & Nerve Tension.)

Now, some might be questioning that, thinking that the psoas “goes flaccid” when your knees are bent. Here's the science behind that:

For this particular conversation, there are two kinds of muscle fibers: extrafusal fibers, and intrafusal fibers. The EXTRA-fusal fibers are what take volitional, purposeful, more-or-less (often less) Conscious Action. They are on average about 70% of the fibers of a muscle, and are mostly long chains of actin-myosin molecules that generate strong pulling forces. They are controlled by the alpha system, the more-or-less (often less) conscious part of the brain, connecting to the cerebral

Then we have the INTRA-fusal fibers, about 30% of the fibers, but also contain the muscle spindles (these are the nerves measuring the lengthening & shortening of the muscle). Therefore each of these has a much smaller portion of actin-myosin contractile molecules ONLY at each end of the muscle, with the spindles in-between. So the intrafusals do not generate very strong pulling power. And, they are controlled by the gamma nerves system, terminating in the lower part of the brain, and are fully UN-conscious in operation.

What the intrafusal fibers DO do is make fine-tune adjustments to accommodate the sensitivities of the muscle spindles AND monitor and adjust background postural relationships. These are what adjusts the tension levels in specific muscles at all times, and without you having to think about it. (If you had to control those with your conscious mind you'd never get up out of bed in the AM. Too much work to think that much!)

Now, there is a neuromuscular principle saying that Nature never allows for a slack muscle in the body. The gamma-intrafusal system ALWAYS takes up whatever slack shows up in any muscles at any time. Otherwise, you'd be moving like a rag doll much or most of the time, without a strong, stable base to move from.

So, whenever you bring your knees toward your chest, even if you are NOT using the psoas to accomplish that action, or you do use psoas and then relax it (the extrafusal fibers) "fully," the intrafusal fibers WILL shorten to take up the slack in the muscle. They will be at least somewhat contacted. You will have succeeded in relaxing your psoas muscles into a shortened position. When people have C.E.M.&.N.T., too much Resting Tonus, their muscles tend to over-do the compensations. (That's probably what's happening with your psoas.)

Add to that the Law of Facilitation, or the law of habit, and the gamma-intrafusal circuits will "learn" the habit of being even MORE contracted & shortened than they already were.

That is one reason CR does not work so well for everyone.

So, what do you do? ... You can START at CR position, but you need to END UP with a fully extended hip joint, so the psoas lengthens as much as possible by the time you're done with the process.

You can maybe do some manual work down there (as described in a previous post) since psoas WILL be more relaxed as far as the extrafusal fibers are concerned. But both extrafusal and extrafusal fibers are doing somewhat different things. The extrafusals might even be fully relaxed (in your case, that is doubtful) yet the intrafusals be quite active.

This distinction between intra- and extra-fusals is, I believe, the cause of so much misunderstanding, mis-diagnosis, and mis-prescription of treatment of many problems it isn't funny. I could go on and on about all that, but I'll stop for now.

I hope that helps. ... Good Luck, Dominic!

◦ *Dominic*
APRIL 30, 2013 AT 2:20 PM

Hey David,

Thank-you so much for all of your time. It means a lot. After looking through everything, I am still having a hard time locating my psoas. I loosened my hamstrings, glutes, and abs by stretching. This, in turn, caused me to feel a tremendous pull in my right inner thigh. Also, I have had a deal of nausea now. I don't know why I can't find it... I'm trying to lay on my back with something under my legs and I am lifting my leg up while my hand is sunk into my abdomen area and I am not feeling the muscle move. I don't know what to do.

I'm sorry... Thank-you,

Dominic

- David Scott Lynn
MAY 3, 2013 AT 4:36 AM
Hi Again, Dominic,

Sorry I was missing the last few days.

The nausea is not a surprise. If you did a thorough job on the hamstrings, gluteals, etc., then the psoas might have actually tightened up even more as you fed slack to it. And it can cause nausea if it spasms.

If you cannot feel the psoas, try this: And to simplify, let's assume your working on your left psoas first ...

When you are picking up your left leg with your fingers on the left side of your abdomen, FIRST, cross your right ankle over and just above the knee of the left leg. Your right knee will be hanging freely, off to your far right.

As you lift your left knee, press back down against it with your right ankle & leg. This produces more resistance in the left leg. So psoas more fully engages, rather than just iliacus and other hip flexors. In fact, paradoxically, psoas does not usually need to engage unless you are needing a pretty strong force to lift the leg.

So try that. You should feel psoas pop up into your fingers that way.

And make sure your fingers are just above the inguinal ligament, which is at or slightly above the crease that forms between the bottom of your belly and the top of your thigh. Psoas dives down toward the spine pretty quick after crossing the ridge of the pelvis, and if your fingers are too high up in your abdomen, you might not feel it.

OKAY, Dominic, try that, and please let me know how it goes.

David

- Dominic
MAY 3, 2013 AT 12:01 PM
David,

Thank-you so very much. I will give that a try tonight after work. I have an appointment with a myofascial physical therapist tomorrow night, also. Hopefully he can give me some help.

Your help has been incredibly appreciated.

Take care of yourself ,

Dominic

◦ *Dominic*

MAY 8, 2013 AT 12:04 AM

Hey David,

Sorry I have been gone for so long. Your last tip helped me find it! Thank-you so much! I also saw a Myofascial Physical Therapist who thinks he can help me with my problem. He did an examination of my pelvis and found that it is torqued forward on the right and raised up on the right. He thinks that because my "foundation" is off, it is affecting everything above it. Hence, the dizzy "walking on a boat" feeling. So, we are working on getting my body corrected and I am praying that it works. I will keep you posted!

Thank-you so much for your help. It means so very much.

Sincerely,

Dominic

25. *andeejo*

APRIL 7, 2013 AT 8:18 PM

love this discussion... also would like to add for consideration the role of chronic inflammation– sometimes that can cause an elongation but with tightness held so that stretching or manipulating the iliopsoas can be not only painful but counter-productive. strengthening the quads and spinal stabilizing muscles to bring awareness to the legs and back rather than reliance on the psoas (mentioned nicely in Liz' article in Yoga Journal), along with emotional release of anything that may have caused this to be a weak spot, but also anti-inflammatory diet changes and detoxification can help as well... and make sure to consider other issues (such as endometriosis) that could affect the colon/mesosalpinx /psoas and cause a number of odd symptoms and chronic inflammation that makes the psoas more difficult to deal with... i've had several patients (including myself) with psoas problems that caused all kinds of symptoms, then turned out to be related to inflammation or digestive or gynecological issues, so it's a good place to start for physical symptoms and it can lead you in the direction of emotional and other organ system issues as well!

Reply

◦ *David Scott Lynn*

APRIL 25, 2013 AT 9:29 PM

Following up on Andeejo's comment: (Andeejo, are you the doctor at the Center for Sustainable Medicine in Santa Barbara?)

One of the great weaknesses in the "alternative" health care world is the lack of general practitioners who can "clear" a Client of Patient for conditions such as Andeejo points out. Most of my Clients have been to so many doctors & therapists, both orthodox AND alternative, that they've usually been checked so often for all the other possibilities that for some of them, the only thing left is what I do.

But then, those other practitioners had pretty much given up, and the Client nearly so.

I'm often amazed at how many problems are resolved by focusing on the psycho- 29.05.13 09:01

neuro-musculo-fascial system. And I'm amazed at how many people in the massage & bodywork and yoga world have so little idea how much their work can help, or how to do it.

But I'm also under no illusions, either. I prefer a Client's been to more "orthodox" and "alternative" practitioners to clear for other such things, so I'm more confident that I can help them with what I do. Still, I've had many Clients who were scheduled for surgery or told they were in for a life of drugs, or needed "adjustments" for the rest of their lives, but they cancelled that stuff after working with me.

So every practitioner has their little piece of the puzzle, some bigger, some smaller. Even the best one's are not right all the time. And there is still too much dissent — not enough cooperation — between various philosophies of medicine. Too many people like to think that what they do is THE answer.

So, we're still a LONG way away from having a truly comprehensive health care system. And it sounds like Andeejo, or someone like her, is someone we should all know.

Reply

◦ andeejo

APRIL 25, 2013 AT 11:06 PM

Hi! Yes, I'm the doc on that page! My practice is in Santa Barbara. Thank you so much for the acknowledgement, definitely appreciated. I'm an Osteopath, so I do body-work-esque kinds of things (my preference is gentle Biodynamic work), but I'm also Board Certified in Internal Med, and an Ayurvedic practitioner and counselor and I teach meditation I like what you said about people thinking what they do is THE answer. It's important to know we can't ever 'fix' anyone, all I can do is try to translate what the body is saying and create scenarios that favor the person's own innate healing force... and I welcome other practitioners helping in the process... I also find it's helpful if the patient's entire system can be assessed in issues like this, even if it's an 'onion-peeling' process and takes a bit of time. I figure if I can't make significant improvement (so the patient needs to see me less and much less as time goes on), then I'm maybe not the person to work on them, so I have an extensive list of referral people I can send patients to despite me being lucky to have a lot of techniques/knowledge I can draw on... so I encourage practitioners, whenever an issue like this comes up that can have multiple sources and symptoms, to check in with the patient's primary doctor or gynecologist to make sure it's not a process being fueled by a non-musculo-skeletal problem. And vice versa What a great discussion this led to! Nice work! -Andrea

26. Tinou

APRIL 10, 2013 AT 2:19 PM

i liked your post and i shared it

Reply

27. Kathy

APRIL 10, 2013 AT 11:01 PM

Timely subject matter. My massage therapist has been working with me on my Psoas ever since I was involved in a violent emotional trauma several months ago. My fight or flight response had done exactly what it was supposed to, but I had retained some tension in my hips/pelvic area without realizing it. I am so happy she was attuned to this possibility, and am making much physical progress – I didn't even know how their was such a thing

Reply

28. [balancingshadows](#)

APRIL 11, 2013 AT 11:40 AM

Reblogged this on [balancingshadows](#).

Reply

29. [Christine Binnendyk](#)

APRIL 11, 2013 AT 3:24 PM

Great article and nice follow-up conversation! DSL: good points on other issues happening in concert with tight psoas. This is one of the reasons I teach clients several different series for releasing the psoas — gotta listen to your own body to hear what pattern works best for your own issues! Re-posting via <http://www.Facebook.com/AgelessPilates>.

Reply

◦ [David Scott Lynn](#)

APRIL 25, 2013 AT 9:39 PM

Hi Christine! And Thanks! ... I checked out your website and Facebook page & Liked it. Looks like you're doing a lot of interesting stuff. Didn't find much of a Bio on you though.

Take Care,

David

Reply

30. [Christine Binnendyk](#)

APRIL 11, 2013 AT 3:25 PM

Reblogged this on [Effortless Movement](#).

Reply

31. [George Lord, D.C., C.B.P.](#)

APRIL 11, 2013 AT 9:15 PM

A couple of things further: It's related to the kidneys, and if a kidney develops ptosis, it "rides down" the psoas as if on a rail. Being related to the kidneys means that the emotion most involved is fear. The kidneys also have to do with basic life energy, sexuality (especially the left one), and the brain. Lastly, for you meat eaters out there, filet mignon is the psoas of the cow.

Reply

32. [Jabre noha](#)

APRIL 11, 2013 AT 10:19 PM

Very interesting

Reply

33. [Lisa L.](#)

APRIL 12, 2013 AT 10:45 PM

Really interesting! I know this is where I carry a lot of tension from the moment I hit my mat in a wide-legged child's pose.

Reply

34. [Susan](#)

APRIL 13, 2013 AT 8:05 PM

Great article

Reply35. Owen MarcusAPRIL 14, 2013 AT 2:48 PM

We have Ida Rolf to thank for much of our growing appreciation of the pso

As a Rolfer for 30+ years I can say it's very rare to see a client come to me with a relaxed psoas. Some of the tightest psoas were yoga teachers.

Once the psoas gets to a certain point of tension stretching won't release it. I wish it could, but because of the limited body mechanics and significance of the tension it won't release.

Reply◦ David Scott LynnAPRIL 14, 2013 AT 3:50 PM

HI Owen! That's interesting your observation of Yoga Teachers and tight psoas. I think that's in great part to their incessant tucking of pelvis and flattening of their lumbar spine. Doing so contracts psoas, and a lot of them hold that action throughout much of their routines.

I've never worked with a psoas that would not release. However, as I mentioned above, I release the counter-psoas muscles first, mostly all hip extensors and abdominal flexors Rectus & Obliques.

Any of my Clients who had bad or painful experiences having their psoas worked on were surprised at how the right technique and approach caused them no pain, and got lots of result.

Reply36. SharonAPRIL 15, 2013 AT 2:35 PM

"our elemental desire to flourish" resonated with me the most. I've recently started focusing on relaxing/strengthening my psoas, and I swear my sexual desire and experience has increased because of it. Has anyone else experienced that?

Reply37. Jessica SerranoAPRIL 18, 2013 AT 12:02 PM

Reblogged this on Smile. Breathe. Do More. and commented:

I am endlessly intrigued and awed by the intricacies of our anatomy. Currently loving this post by Body Divine.

Lengthen, Open, Relax... or Shorten, Run, Fight...

What is your psoas telling you?

Reply38. Matthew RiversAPRIL 18, 2013 AT 12:40 PM

I am laughing and giggling due to my bodies reaction to finding EXACTLY the right piece, the missing piece indeed of a slow healing in my body. This is the muscle that has been causing me much ongoing work to release, yet I did not know what it was called or how it affected any parts of me. I have just felt and intuitively worked with this muscle over the last few years and reading your article has brought a flood of new light and release already to that area. Thank you so much for this post... literally, thank you SO much! Love and light and reiki to you xxx

[Reply](#)39. [David Scott Lynn](#)APRIL 18, 2013 AT 9:26 PM

To add a little dimension here, every few months or so, if I've been sitting too much and not stretching enough, I start to get a sick feeling. I get a headache, a little dizzy or vertigo maybe, and starting to feel a bit, or a lot, of nausea. Sometimes, if I forget, this will go on for a day or two. When it gets to that point, stretching (yoga) does not work very well, if at all.

But then, when I come to my senses and remember, I lay flat on my back, legs out-stretched, and work on my psoas muscles with my fingers. I use slow, steady, gentle pressure, NO rubbing, gliding, or cross fiber. I just apply steady pressure into the abdominal wall muscles. After they relax enough, I am carried down to the psoas muscles. (It helps to know where they are.) Then, I hold steady pressure on ONE place in the muscles (I'm usually working both sides simultaneously), with no movement, except to sink deeper if the muscle relaxes. (It always does.) Then, after a few "releases" I move to a nearby spot, and start over again.

This usually takes no more than 5 or 10 minutes, and I feel fine again.

If it gets really bad, I might use a massage tool and work on one side at a time. Again, no stroking, gliding, cross fiber ... just steady pressure on the muscle.

[Reply](#)40. [Mary Hendricks](#)APRIL 19, 2013 AT 3:19 AM

Love learning this helpful information. It all makes so much sense!

[Reply](#)41. [Max](#)APRIL 22, 2013 AT 7:22 AM

Great post – thank you

[Reply](#)42. Pingback: [My Soul Muscle Just Got a Lot More Open](#)43. [Christina Savitsky](#)APRIL 30, 2013 AT 1:51 PM

Great article THANKS!! I hope you don't mind me reposting a link on my business' facebook page. I offer horseback riding retreats that incorporate yoga & since the psoas are such a strong core muscle we use them ALOT when we ride, and it's a focus I like to take during my retreats to help riders locate them & use them by choice to keep a neutral pelvis when riding, but also to relax them so that they don't over tighten. It is also very interesting to me, that horses are very grounded in their that root chakra, flight or fight as a prey creature. They also use their psoas to tip their pelvis to move in a more collected frame & better carry a rider. So it all makes SO much sense to me that relaxing those muscles for riders & for horses would help state of mind! Thanks again!!

[Reply](#)44. [montrealnd](#)APRIL 30, 2013 AT 2:06 PM

Hello! This passage has so much wisdom! May I re-post to my blog?

[Reply](#)

45. [YOGiiZA](#)

[APRIL 30, 2013 AT 2:46 PM](#)

lovely

[Reply](#)

46. Pingback: [The Psoas, Muscle of the Soul | A Path of Light](#)

47. [Antinoro Atalay](#)

[MAY 5, 2013 AT 6:09 PM](#)

Mumbo-Jumbo on a grandiose scale. Thank you.

[Reply](#)

◦ [David Scott Lynn](#)

[MAY 6, 2013 AT 5:43 PM](#)

@Antinoro ... RE: *Mumbo Jumbo ...*

Could you be a little more specific? Thank You.

[Reply](#)

48. [Twixmixy](#)

[MAY 6, 2013 AT 11:27 AM](#)

So what poses will help reverse this?

[Reply](#)

49. Pingback: [may spotlight on: svadhishthana \(sacral\) chakra | here | there | everywhere.](#)

50. [Amy](#)

[MAY 9, 2013 AT 7:48 PM](#)

Thanks for the great article. So, what stretches can you do to relax the psoas?

[Reply](#)

51. [Casey Holliman - Sports Massage Therapist](#)

[MAY 10, 2013 AT 4:58 AM](#)

Really good, in depth article on the psoas, and just everything that it is involved in with our bodies (which is a lot!!) I work on the psoas regularly in my practice, mostly working with athletes, they always have a psoas that is on fire, puling them out of alignment.

[Reply](#)

52. Pingback: [The Seat of the Soul | Imperfectly Whole: Yoga & Christianity](#)

53. Pingback: [Sacred body part 5: Skin | Druid Life](#)

54. [Pavlo](#)

[MAY 13, 2013 AT 2:29 PM](#)

I get what you are saying about that muscle being a stabiliser and bio-intelligent (but I happen to believe the entire body is bio-intelligent, not just isolated muscles). But... 'Reptilian brain'. Oh please. Call it something else that makes more sense. We are not reptiles, we are 100% human. Some people will readily believe anything if it's couched in yoga terminology or pseudo-spirituality.

[Reply](#)

55. Pingback: [Core Muscle | Kelly LoGiudice](#)

MAY 19, 2013 AT 4:24 PM

That was the great article . I used to be very active in yoga , pilates, and dancing , but in the past two years I have developed spinal stenosis, pinch nerve, and sciatica plus my left knee is compleatly destroid with astioarthritis . I am in so much pain i can't even walk . Please if you send me some information about your article . Thank you shirin

Reply

57. *angela*

MAY 21, 2013 AT 1:00 AM

Wow. Does this ever make sense...I have had worsening back/hip pain since my dad died a few months ago. My sense was the pain was more than just physical...

Reply

58. *goddessdivinewisdom*

MAY 27, 2013 AT 2:23 PM

Thank you for introducing us to Koch's work. I've long known (intuitively) that my back pain was relieved when I stretched my legs, especially the upper part of the leg, which I later learned was called the psoas.

Your blog is Divine. ~Namaste.

Reply

59. *Thom Shenk*

MAY 28, 2013 AT 3:06 AM

Ida Rolf when asked if there was anywhere in the body that when released and long ment that they were organized in gravity answered "God forbid the 12th rib" Meaning if the psoas was long and not pulling the diaphragm posterior and shortening the lumbar below the person was prubably organized well around a central core in gravity

Reply

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#) Theme: [Customized Forever](#) by [Automattic](#).