

SOFTEN THE PSOAS (SO AS), EXPAND THE TORSO

I often refer to the Psoas as the deepest abdominal muscle, one that connects our spine to our legs via the pelvis. The Psoas is indeed our most important postural muscle and when we are totally connected with it it will give us maximum stride length, speed efficiency of movement and most importantly decrease the amount of structural tension in our lumbar spines. With over 70% of the working population suffering from some form of lower back pain we cannot ignore the Psoas. It should be our number one focal point in addressing poor posture and poor function.

Let's face it with all the hours of sitting we do at our offices in our cars and at home our Psoas is overworked, hypertonic weak and dysfunctional.

The Psoas is a power muscle, a posture muscle and a stabilizing muscle all in one. It also links locomotion or gait with breathing and alignment as there are direct fascial and ligamentous links into the diaphragm via the crura. This gives the Psoas a crucial role to play in the general function of our vital organs. The health of the Psoas is key to our vitality and physical and emotional well-being.

Let's look at the Range of motion of the Psoas. When fully contracting the psoas we are able to pull or flex the hip joint to a full athletic range of 140 to 160 degrees. When engaging the opposite muscle, the Gluteus Maximus (medial fibers) which is our most powerful hip extensor muscle this will allow the hip to move through a range of 15 to 20 degrees of extension. In most people the Psoas has been so shortened and chronically weakened through prolonged sitting and poor postural habits, bulging bellies and poor bio-mechanics that achieving full hip extension is nigh on impossible without intervention from a skilled physical therapist.

Losing flexibility in the Psoas you lose stability, joint mobility, muscular integrity, stride length and speed. Basically our elemental desire to flourish and survive has been lost. How does this make us feel? - Fatigued, listless, in pain, dysfunctional, fearful and weak.

The Psoas is responsible for holding us upright. The whole kinetic or moving chain is dependent on the Psoas to lift our legs in order to walk, to stabilize the spine, and provide support through the trunk. It also forms a stable shelf for the vital organs in the abdominal cavity to sit upon.

As mentioned our psoas is directly connected to our most vital breathing organ-the Diaphragm which affects our breath and our fear reflexes. This direct link goes into the interior part of our brain stem- our reptilian brain. From here it runs into the spinal cord. Our fight or flight survival instincts are all controlled from this point.

Our highly demanding, overstrung, over achieving lifestyles is causing our adrenal glands to place us into a survival mode, triggering a neural response through the brain stem to shut down and hyper-contract our Psoas muscles making us ready and poised to flee or fight. We are not aware that this is happening to us.

On a structural level a tight psoas creates a forward pull on the pelvis as well as an external rotation on the hip joints forcing us to lock out our knees and tighten our calves throwing us ever forward onto the balls of our feet, reducing the mechanical efficiency and impairing the drainage of our lymphatic fluids generally interfering with all movements of tissue fluids.

An overloaded Psoas has physical and emotional ramifications. It tells you that you are exhausting your immune system. It is slowing you down physically and bio chemically and it is putting your physical and functional body systems into danger.

As the Psoas opens, lengthens and softens, the ground reactive force from movement can flow and transfer its weight and energy through the bones and soft tissues from the heels to the legs to the spine creating a coordinated movement and fluid posture. It is an uninhibited and an un-interrupted flow of life force that will allow you to move freely and gracefully.

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