

Spanda Yoga Movement Therapist Professional Yoga Therapist Training Program: The Poetry, Anatomy, and Function, of the Psoas Muscle

Cultural, emotional and poetic ideas influence how we embody our own anatomy and how we understand the anatomy of others.

General description of the psoas muscle:

The psoas muscle is one of the largest muscles of the body and lies at our core. It is the only muscle that joins the upper and lower body.

What "core of the body" can mean:

- a) Core is a solid center whose strength is reflected in how non-reactive it is to the challenges of changing tensile forces, and relationship to gravity
- b) Core is a fluid center of transmission and reception, a place of organizing
- c) Core is a private place, where one can closely hold ideas, traumas and dreams
- d) Core is where one must be very strong, and a core muscle should be strengthened for best utility
- e) Core is the place of wildness in us that underlies our civilized selves, and as such is a source of creativity and resilience
- f) Core is the place of wildness in us, and as such needs to be contained and harnessed by our civilized selves
- g) Core is what our true essence is, unchanging through our experiences.

Views of the psoas muscle as explored through somatic research

- a) Psoas is an efficient thigh flexor and using it well makes movement more fluid
- b) Psoas is our inner snake, and our primary means to shapeshift
- c) Psoas is our inner neuroceptor, always measuring how safe our environment is, and always communicating that information to the body as a whole
- d) Psoas is more an organ of perception than it is a muscle
- e) The Psoas is like a cobra, with a wide hood at the top
- f) The Psoas is a true spiral, in both the direction of its fibers and its pathway in the body, and as a spiral includes all planes and the emotions connected with each plane.
- g) The Psoas is like a rope, and the spine and pelvis are like a pulley. As long as the tension is appropriate, all the components work well.
- h) The Psoas is a pendulum, storing up energy on downswing to use on the upswing
- i) The Psoas is how the legs connect to the heart
- j) The Psoas condenses as it moves toward the earth, and opens like a sail to go upward toward the heart and heavens.
- k) The psoas is powerful, long and thick
- l) The psoas links the axial body to the appendicular body
- m) The psoas is the link between the pelvic floor diaphragm and the thoracic diaphragm
- n) The psoas is the primary muscle of orgasm
- o) Along with the diaphragm, the psoas is the pump that bathes the organs with fluid
- p) The psoas is the initiator for walking
- q) The psoas is the source of "gut feelings"
- r) When someone speaks of feeling something "in every fiber of my being," she/he is referring to the fibers of the psoas

The fitness of anatomical neighbors matter, since they affect one another's wellbeing. Adjacent tissues share responsible for structural integrity as well as affect one another's physiological functioning. Since the psoas has so many neighbors, and has such important neighbors, the wellness of the psoas is influential on the whole body.

For example, the lumbar plexus is embedded inside the psoas, so the fitness of the psoas and the fitness of the nerves affect both. Pain in the lower body sometimes is a reflection of pressure a nerve embedded in the psoas due to the state of the psoas muscle tissue around it.

Another example of a neighbor of the psoas is the diaphragm. The diaphragm attaches to the spine via crura, or legs. The archway created by these 'legs' provides a space for the psoas to interdigitate with the diaphragm, as they both connect to the same vertebrae. Since the diaphragm in turn has continuous fibers with the pericardium, the heart and psoas have a remarkable neighborhood connection.

Psoas and Lumbar Curve: Only humans walk upright, and only humans have the lumbar curve for the bipedal gait. The Psoas is integral to creating and maintaining a healthy lumbar curve. An overly arched lower back may reflect an overly tight psoas, or, it may be tight as an effect of the lumbar curve that is caused by something else, or the psoas may not be involved.

Psoas and Fear and Flight response: When running and fighting, or curling into a protective ball may become necessary, flexion tone loads in the psoas. When the danger is felt to be over, the psoas can let go, and shed the stress hormones and metabolites. Since modern life is deficient in "all safe" cues, many of us carry stress chemicals all or almost all of the time, and our psoas do not have sufficient time in a neutral, peaceful state.

Palpation of the Psoas:

Palpation of the psoas is not recommended because of the delicate structures around and superficial to the muscle. Attempts at palpation may also set off fight or flight response for the client.

Strengthening and Stretching the Psoas:

In part because the psoas is mainly a postural muscle, strengthening it or stretching it in the sense of isolated, repetitive movements is counter-indicated. Such activities would more likely deepen patterns of restriction. The goal of working with the psoas is to increase the range and ease of contraction and of release, so this muscle, and ourselves, can respond quickly and smoothly to the present moment.

Suggested explorations:

Lie in constructive rest, with supports under your knees. How does your torso meet the floor?

Lie in constructive rest, lift one foot an inch off the floor. How does your body accommodate this movement? What else besides your leg and foot move? How do you accommodate the weight shift in your torso? Can you do this movement in a different way?

Stand with one foot on a yoga block, and while keeping your pelvis level, allow the other leg to hang, and then gently swing it a few inches forward and back. Where does it feel like your leg is hanging from? Where is the swinging initiated?

Lie in constructive rest and with stable spine and relaxed belly, initiate a thigh flexion and lower the leg to extended position on the floor. Repeat the thigh flexion from the extended position, and put your attention on the release and lengthening torso through pelvis to sole of foot and toes. Repeat with 2 small soft balls under your pelvis.

Stand in a comfortable lunge. Where does your back leg feel like it begins? Can you find the pathway from top of psoas to lesser trochanter? Do you feel ease on that pathway? Can you shift slightly so as to find even greater ease?

Sit on large ball in a squat position, make slow concentric circles, first in one direction then the other direction, vary the tempo, allow air to come in and out of you with comfort, feel your core from mouth to pelvic floor.

In side lying, with a blanket under your hips and another under your ribs, gradually in your own time, curl into a ball, and extend outward so all limbs are extended. What parts of this movement are most familiar to you? What parts of this movement are most pleasurable to you? What happens if you repeat with the intention of initiating the movement from your psoas?