



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

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YOGA THERAPY THE PSOAS MUSCLE (hip flexors)

The basic function of the psoas is as a hip flexor. It draws your thigh upward and bends your leg at the hip when you walk. The psoas is the only muscle in the human body connecting the upper body to the lower body. The muscle attaches to the vertebrae of the lower spine, moves through the pelvis and connects to a tendon at the top of the femur. It also attaches to the diaphragm, so it's also connected to your breathing.

Our hip flexors are the engine through which our bodies move. They control balance, our ability to sit, stand, twist, reach, bend, walk and step. Everything goes through the hips. When the hip flexors tighten it can lead to lots of problems. Your hips are the bridge between your upper body and lower body. They are at the centre of your body's movement.

Pelvic Alignment

A properly functioning psoas muscle creates a neutral pelvic alignment, stabilises the hips, supports the lower spine and abdomen, supports the organs in the pelvic and abdominal cavity and it is what gives you great mobility and core strength. You may suffer from a tight psoas due to the amount of time you spend each day sitting in a chair. Sitting all day causes your hips to become stuck in a forward thrust position. This leads to pulling on the lower back and decreased blood flow and circulation through the hips. This tightness results in physical discomfort, making it more difficult to fall asleep and more likely to wake up during the night.

Tight Hip Flexors

The cause of a bulging belly is likely to be tight psoas muscles, which cause the lower back to curve, pushing out the stomach. When the psoas works properly, it pulls the abdomen back and tucks the tummy in. Tight hip flexors aren't strong hip flexors. Sitting for extended periods of time at work and at home keeps the psoas muscles in constant contraction. This position shortens the muscles without strengthening them. Your hips need to be strong, stable and have appropriate mobility to support your body above them and your limbs below them. Chronic tightness in the hips can also drag other muscles and joints out of alignment, including the lower back and knees. The main cause of tight hips is weak hip flexors.







Correct Alignment of the Psoas

If the psoas is tighter or shorter on one side, it will cause the spine not only to bend to the side, but also to rotate or twist. This is one cause of how scoliosis manifests.

The psoas plays an essential role in grounding the body through the legs. Without proper alignment and working with the psoas, you will not benefit from the opening and flowing, and expansion in yoga postures. Inversions such as a headstand are all about balance through the spine and hips, which doesn't happen without the cooperation of the psoas. If the psoas is not properly aligned in a headstand, the lower back will arch and create a banana shape.

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YOGA POSTURES FOR THE PSOAS

<p>BADDHA KONASANA (bound angle) One of the best postures to open the hips. You can increase the opening of the hips by bending forward. Always come forward from the hip joints, not the waist. Bend your elbows and push them against the inner thighs or calves (but never on the knees). If your head doesn't rest comfortably on the floor, support it on a block or the front edge of a chair seat.</p>	
<p>SETU BANDHA (bridge) This posture stretches the chest, neck, and spine. It also stretches and lengthens the hip flexors. Press into your feet and move your chest toward your chin. Hold the mula bandha as a control for your lower back. As you roll down, make sure every part of your spine touches the floor.</p>	
<p>PARIPURNA NAVASANA (boat) This posture strengthens the abdomen, hip flexors, and spine. You can use a belt around the feet to help you stay in this posture. Remember to stay on your sitting bones and keep lifting the sternum with the kidneys moving forward. A partner can sit behind you and help you to keep the sternum lifted.</p>	
<p>BHUJANGASANA (cobra) This posture will stretch the hip flexors but don't overdo the backbend. To find the height at which you can work comfortably and avoid straining your back, take your hands off the floor for a moment, so that the height you find will be through extension.</p>	
<p>DHANURASANA (bow) This posture stretches the entire front of the body, ankles, thighs and groins, abdomen and chest, and throat, and deep hip flexors (psoas). It also strengthens the back muscles. Start by holding your ankles and flexing your feet. Use a belt if you cannot reach your ankles. Press your pelvis down to the mat before lifting your legs.</p>	
<p>ANJANEYASANA (low lunge) To improve balance, practice this posture facing a wall. Press the big toe of the front foot against the wall and stretch your arms up, finger tips to the wall. If your palms are not flat on the mat, use blocks under your hands. This allows you to move the sternum forward and increases the stretch in the hip flexors. Lifting your knee off the mat will also increase the stretch.</p>	
<p>USTRASANA (camel) This posture stretches the deep hip flexors (psoas) and strengthens the back muscles. You can practise this posture with your thighs pressing into the wall as you lift your sternum. If you can't reach your heels, rest each hand on a block. Position the blocks just outside each heel, and stand them at their highest height.</p>	