

THE PSOAS MUSCLES

Written by Margaret McCarthy, April 2023

The **psoas muscles**....my favourite group of muscles, are quite possibly the most important in your body. Without this essential muscle group, you wouldn't even be able to get out of bed in the morning! They are the principal connectors between your upper body and your legs and help to stabilize your spine. These muscles are involved in every movement, be it walking, cycling, dancing or just sitting.

Physically, your psoas muscles are the deepest muscles in your core, and they are the only muscles that connect your spine to your legs. They attach from your 12th thoracic vertebrae to your 5th lumbar vertebrae, through your pelvis, and then finally attach to your femurs. They allow you to bend your hips and legs when walking up stairs and to bend forward to pick something up from the floor. They steady your trunk during movement, even sitting, and support your internal organs. Because they are major flexors a tight or overstretched psoas muscle could be the cause of many of your aches and pains, including low back and pelvic pain due to the surrounding muscles overcompensating and becoming overused.

People do need to be mindful when doing the simplest of actions, because by not moving correctly you can strain your psoas muscles very easily. For instance, standing and twisting from your waist without moving your feet, especially if lifting something heavy. Exercises, like sit ups or ballet-style leg lifts can also strain these muscles.

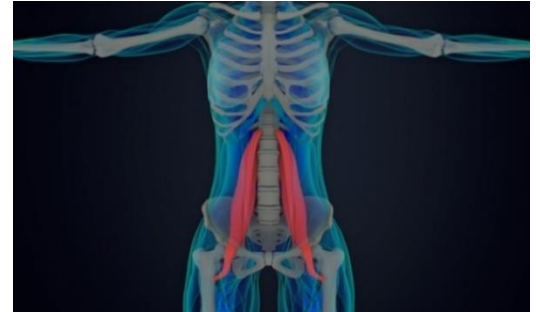
The importance of understanding the body mechanics and taking care when performing many activities is vital in avoiding injury, because many professional people in health care don't understand the intricacy of the psoas muscles, which can often lead to a misdiagnosis and treatment for their pain. What is not always understood is the connection the psoas muscles have with the diaphragm. The two are connected through fascia that also connects the other hip muscles. These connections between the diaphragm and psoas muscles are what gives you the ability to walk, breathe and also, how you respond to fear and excitement. If you are startled or stressed, your psoas contracts, especially if the stress is prolonged, which also has a direct influence on your fight-or-flight response. Your psoas will be constantly in a state of contraction during long periods of stress be it emotional or physical. This also happens when you sit for long periods of time, engage in excessive running or walking, or do prolonged periods of sit-ups. All these activities squeeze the front of your hip and shorten your psoas muscle.

A tight psoas muscle can lead to inefficient leg length, knee and low back pain, postural problems, causing tight hamstrings which can cause the sacrum to lose its natural curve. Constipation too can be caused by tight psoas muscles and also tiredness. A tight psoas muscle can alter the position of the ribcage. This causes mouth breathing which curbs the amount of oxygen taken in. When you breath properly your kidneys and adrenals are being massaged by the movement of your diaphragm which stimulates blood circulation. So, when the psoas muscles are tight or overstretched, this stimulation doesn't happen causing physical and emotional fatigue.

While the majority of people with psoas issues have tight psoas muscles, there are some people whose psoas muscles can be overstretched. In this case, if you stretch your psoas and it is already overstretched, you will cause more problems.

I have had many patients say to me “I just picked up a cup from the table and my back went”! This simple task is not the cause of the back pain, it is a movement too far for the psoas to cope any further. Unfortunately, the warning signs from the body had previously been ignored and this simple task highlighted the problem!
 When questioned, the patient will admit to having over stretched or just overworked in the garden a week or so ago or did that extra lift at the gym and thought at the time a sit down or an aspirin would sort it out! They actually ignored the warning signs their body was giving, because they were not aware of psoas issues.

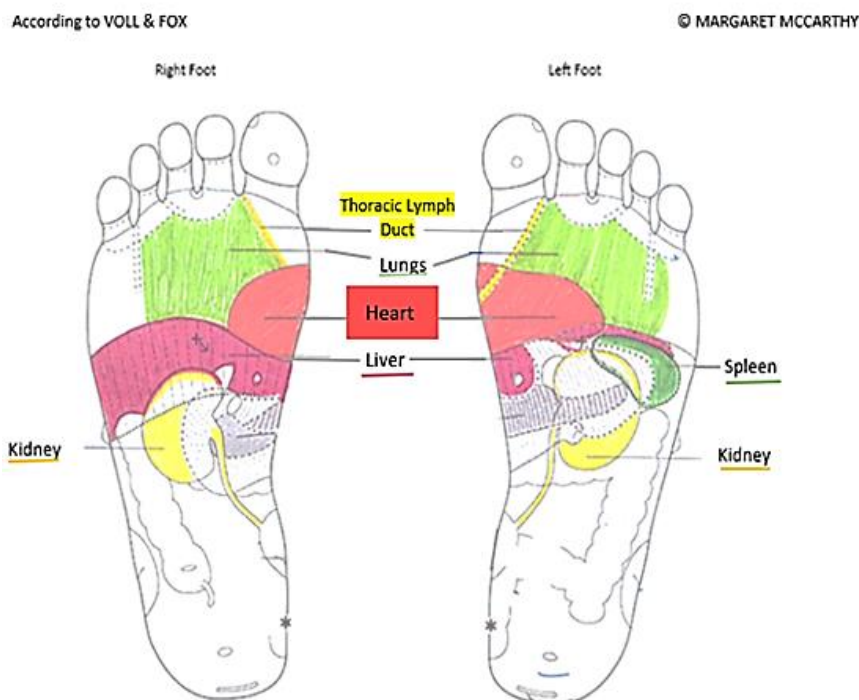
In diagram (i) of the psoas attachments, from your 12th thoracic vertebrae to your 5th lumbar vertebrae, through your pelvis, and then finally attach to your femurs.
 This diagram will help you understand further why many of the symptoms I have outlined above occur when you have issues with psoas muscles.



(i) Diagram

So, what self-help is available to deal with tight or overstretched psoas muscles?

1. In a warm room dressed in comfortable clothes, lie on your back with knees bent and your feet resting on the floor hip-width apart. This is an exercise where gravity assists, so do not push your back or buttocks into the floor, just relax.
 Rest your arms over your abdomen and breath in through your nose for a slow count of 5... hold for a slow count of 5, breath out through your mouth for a slow count of 5, then breath normally in through your nose out through your mouth for a slow count of 5.
 Repeat 5 times and remember not to rush through the breathing.
 Stay in this position for 15 minutes.



* Diagram (ii)

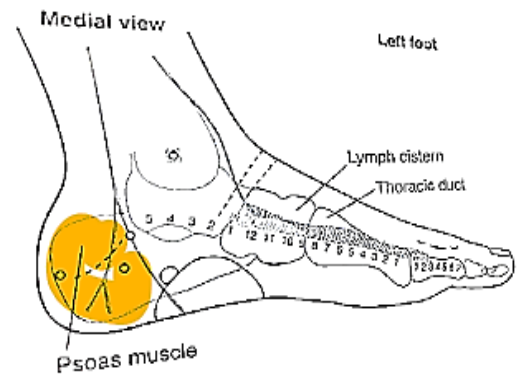
2. If possible, stay in your position on the floor, elevate one of your legs onto the cushioned lap of another person to work on the psoas muscles through the reflexology points on your feet.

Start by working on the zones for the filters: the liver, kidney spleen and lungs of both feet. This assists with lymphatic drainage, preventing the organs from being overwhelmed with toxic substances.

The filters. Liver, kidneys spleen and lungs

Then the psoas muscles on both feet.
The area marked covers both psoas major and minor and other muscles in the area.
Finish by doing the filters of both feet again. Spending a total of 15 minutes on each foot.
Relax after your treatment by repeating the breathing exercises.

If you don't have another person to work on your feet, as long as your pain is not too severe work on your own feet, I always find sitting with your back hard up against the arm of a sofa works well, lift the leg nearest the inside of the sofa to work on, leaving the other leg stretched out or hanging over the sofa.... work on opposite leg in the same way.



* Diagram (iii)

With your self-help diagrams may you have psoas muscles that are neither tight or overstretched.
Good Luck with your new way of living and feeling.

With best wishes Margaret

*Diagram (ii) & (iii)

These diagrams are copied from my book "Lymphatic therapy for toxic Decongestion"

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