



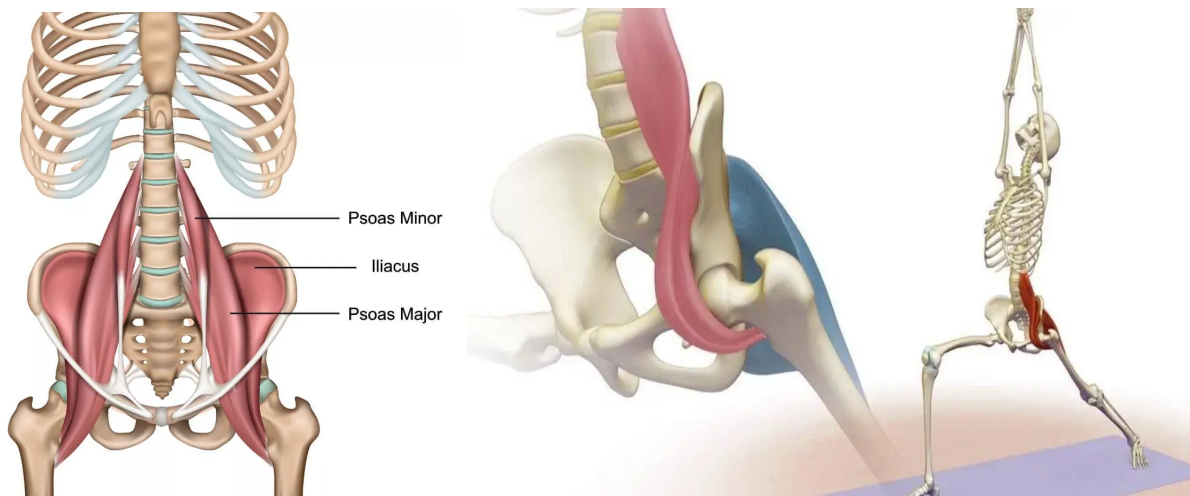
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The Mighty Psoas (pronounced: sō-as)

Your psoas muscle plays an incredibly important role. It is a hidden muscle tucked behind your abdomen and so it is a bit more difficult to envisage than other muscles that you can see and palpate. There are a number of reasons why it is so important.

The muscle gets its name from the Greek word, “loin”. The muscle pulls your lower spine forward giving you the curve that you can feel in your lower back.



The psoas muscle in the above picture is the muscle that originates from the spine.

1. It is used to hold you **upright**.
2. It helps you **move**. Your first movement as you start your run or walk is to swing your leg forward. It's your psoas that gets you **moving**.
3. It is linked to the spine. A shortened psoas will place unwanted **pressure on the spine**.
4. The more you sit, the **shorter** the muscle becomes.
5. Psoas connects to the **diaphragm for breathing**. Dysfunctional psoas can adversely affect breathing.
6. The muscle fires during **stressful situations**. You have two reactions to stress – fight or flight. The psoas muscle is involved in both. In other words, you will either sprint off, which means that the psoas will initiate that movement, or you will fight. Fighting means that you will pull down into a more protective position. Once again the psoas fires up. If things really go wrong and you get forced to curl up into the fetal position, it's the psoas that will curl your legs up to protect your abdomen. On another note, I am sure you have heard the term, "I just wanted to curl up into a ball and cry/die." Emotions influence posture. People that have gone through stressful situations will often shorten the psoas.

1. Crescent Lunge Knee-Up

What it does: Strengthens glutes (especially the gluteus medius) and hip flexors.



How to:

- Start in high lunge with left foot forward, knee bent at 90 degrees, hips square, and toes facing forward.
- Lift arms straight up as you stand and draw your right knee toward your chest.
- Return to starting position.
- Complete 10 reps, then repeat on the opposite leg.
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2. Full-Range Figure Four

What it does: Opens hip joints and stretches glutes.



How to:

- Start on the floor with your right leg bent and foot on the floor.
- Cross left leg over right knee.
- With hands behind for stability, gently rotate the knee left and right
- Complete 10 reps, then repeat on the opposite leg.

3. Low Lunge Variation

What it does: Strengthens quads and hips, lengthens psoas.



How to:

- Start in a low lunge with left foot planted, knee bent to 90 degrees, and right knee on the floor.
- Place palms flat on each side of left foot.
- Un-tuck right toes and lift right arm above head as you lean to left side.
- Hold for five deep breaths, then repeat on the opposite side.

4. One-Legged Bridge Lift and Lower

- **What it does:** Activates glutes and lengthens and strengthens hip flexors.



How to:

- Lie face-up with knees bent and feet flat on the floor, arms resting at sides.
- Press into heels and engage glutes to lift hips.
- Transfer weight to left leg and extend right leg straight out for five breaths.
- Inhale as you lower right leg to hover over floor for five breaths, then exhale as you lift it back up.
- Perform 8 reps, then repeat on opposite leg.

5. Skating Squat

What it does: Strengthens glutes and strengthened hip flexors.



How to:

- Stand with legs just wider than hip-width apart.
- Send hips back and bend at knees to lower into a squat.
- Shift weight to the right leg as you rise up to standing and extend the left leg back (like you're gliding on skates) while tightening your glutes.
- Return to squat and repeat on the opposite leg.
- Continue alternating for 60 seconds.