

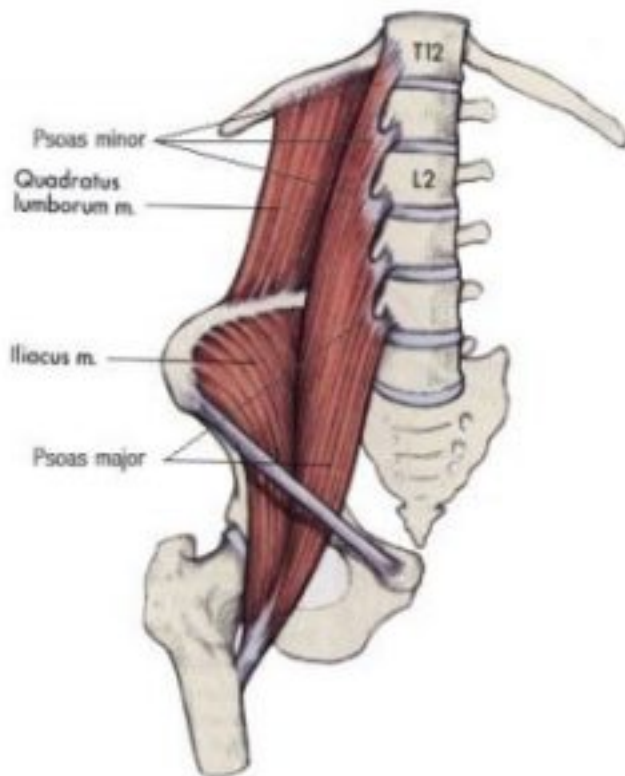
The Psoas: Muscle of The Soul

I was delighted when I first came across [Liz Koch's](#) amazing work because it confirmed much of what I'd been intuiting on my own. I had begun to open and close my yoga practise with hip opening poses with the specific intention of releasing tension in my psoas and hip flexors. I'd breathe and imagine tension flowing out of constricted muscles to be released as energy into the torso.

It worked, I'd feel my body soften yet somehow grow stronger.

Reading Liz Koch I instantly realized what I was doing – by learning to relax my psoas I was literally energizing my deepest core by reconnecting with the powerful energy of the earth. According to Koch, the psoas is far more than a core stabilizing muscle; it is an organ of perception composed of bio-intelligent tissue and “literally embodies our deepest urge for survival, and more profoundly, our elemental desire to flourish.”

Well, I just had to learn more. Here is just a sprinkling of the [research](#) that Liz Koch and others have uncovered regarding the importance of the psoas to our health, vitality and emotional well-being.



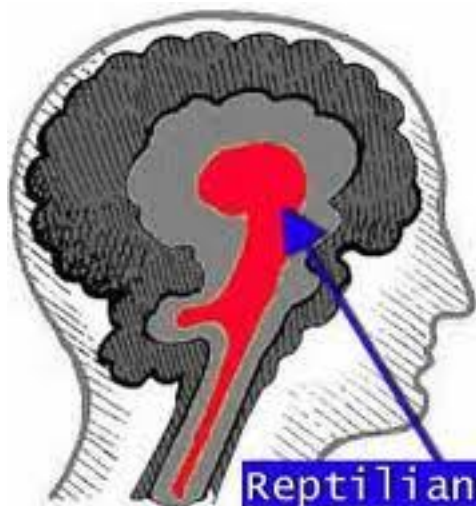
The Psoas muscle (pronounced so-as) is the deepest muscle of the human body affecting our structural balance, muscular integrity, flexibility, strength, range of motion, joint mobility, and organ functioning.

Growing out of both sides of the spine, the psoas spans laterally from the 12th thoracic vertebrae (T12) to each of the 5 lumbar vertebrae. From there it flows down through the abdominal core, the pelvis, to attach to the top of the femur (thigh) bone.

The Psoas is the only ‘muscle’ to connect the spine to the legs. It is responsible for holding us upright, and allows us to lift our legs in order to walk. A healthily functioning psoas stabilizes the

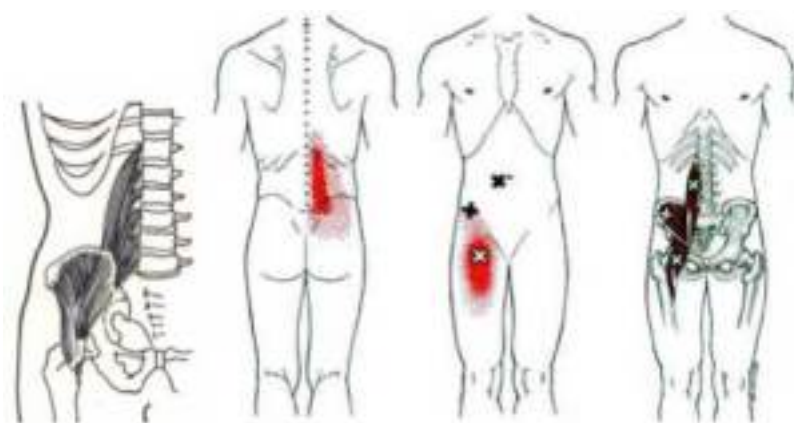
spine and provides support through the trunk, forming a shelf for the vital organs of the abdominal core.

The psoas is connected to the diaphragm through connective tissue or fascia which affects both our breath and fear reflex. This is because the psoas is directly linked to the reptilian brain, the most ancient interior part of the brain stem and spinal cord. As Koch writes “Long before the spoken word or the organizing capacity of the cortex developed, the reptilian brain, known for its survival instincts, maintained our essential core functioning.”



Koch believes that our fast paced modern lifestyle (which runs on the adrenaline of our sympathetic nervous system) chronically triggers and tightens the psoas – making it literally ready to run or fight. The psoas helps you to spring into action – or curl you up into a protective ball.

If we constantly contract the psoas due to stress or tension, the muscle eventually begins to shorten leading to a host of painful conditions including low back pain, sacroiliac pain, sciatica, disc problems, spondylolysis, scoliosis, hip degeneration, knee pain, menstruation pain, infertility, and digestive problems.



A tight psoas not only creates structural problems, it constricts the organs, puts pressure on nerves, interferes with the movement of fluids, and impairs diaphragmatic breathing.

In fact, “The psoas is so intimately involved in such basic physical and emotional reactions, that a chronically tightened psoas continually signals your body that you’re in danger, eventually exhausting the adrenal glands and depleting the immune system.”

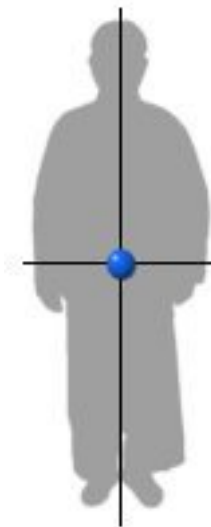
And according to Koch, this situation is exacerbated by many things in our modern lifestyle, from car seats to constrictive clothing, from chairs to shoes that distort our posture, curtail our natural movements and further constrict our psoas.

Koch believes the first step in cultivating a healthy psoas is to release unnecessary tension. But “to work *with* the psoas is not to try to control the muscle, but to cultivate the

awareness necessary for sensing its messages. This involves making a conscious choice to become somatically aware.”



A relaxed psoas is the mark of play and creative expression. Instead of the contracted psoas, ready to run or fight, the relaxed and released psoas is ready instead to lengthen and open, to dance. In many yoga poses (like tree) the thighs can't fully rotate outward unless the psoas releases. A released psoas allows the front of the thighs to lengthen and the leg to move independently from the pelvis, enhancing and deepening the lift of the entire torso and heart.



Koch believes that by cultivating a healthy psoas, we can rekindle our body's vital energies by learning to reconnect with the life force of the universe. Within the Taoist tradition the psoas is spoken of as the seat or muscle of the soul, and surrounds the lower "Dan tien" a major energy center of body. A flexible and strong psoas grounds us and allows subtle energies to flow through the bones, muscles and joints.

Koch writes "The psoas, by conducting energy, grounds us to the earth, just as a grounding wire prevents shocks and eliminates static on a radio. Freed and grounded, the spine can awaken"... "As gravitational flows transfer weight through bones, tissue, and muscle, into the earth, the earth rebounds, flowing back up the legs and spine, energizing, coordinating and animating posture, movement and expression. It is an uninterrupted conversation between self, earth, and cosmos."

So, it might be worth it, next time you practice, to tune in and pay attention to what your bio-intelligent psoas has to say.