

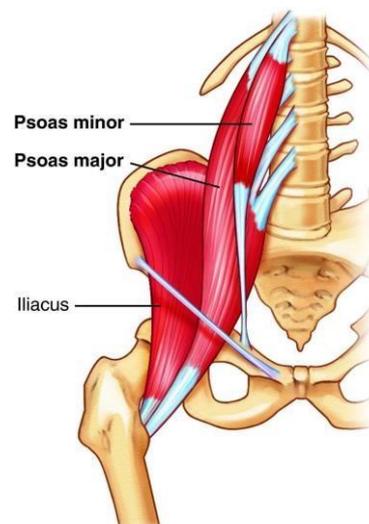


THE PSOAS AND LOWER BACK PAIN

We've all heard that having "tight hip flexors" leads to lower back pain. At the gym, we hop on the foam roller or roll around on a spike ball to try to release them. PSO-what? Very rarely is tightness the sole problem, there is almost always another underlying cause. So how do we know what is causing hip flexor tightness? What even is the psoas? Visit our website at [www.physio4all.com.au](#) for more information.

What is the Psoas?

The psoas is a deep-seated core muscle connecting the lumbar vertebrae to the femur. It works very closely with iliacus, another hip flexor, as they share the same tendon and insertion point on the femur. The psoas major is the biggest and strongest player in a group of muscles called the hip flexors that contract to pull the thigh and the torso toward each other. Since the psoas attaches to the spine, it also plays a major role in stabilising the spine.



Symptoms of a Dysfunctional Psoas

Often symptoms mimic those of a lumbar spine disc herniation, including:

- Lower back pain
- Groin pain
- Anterior thigh/hip pain
- Deep abdominal or pelvic pain
- Pain in the contralateral glute or posterior thigh

What Causes the Psoas Dysfunction?

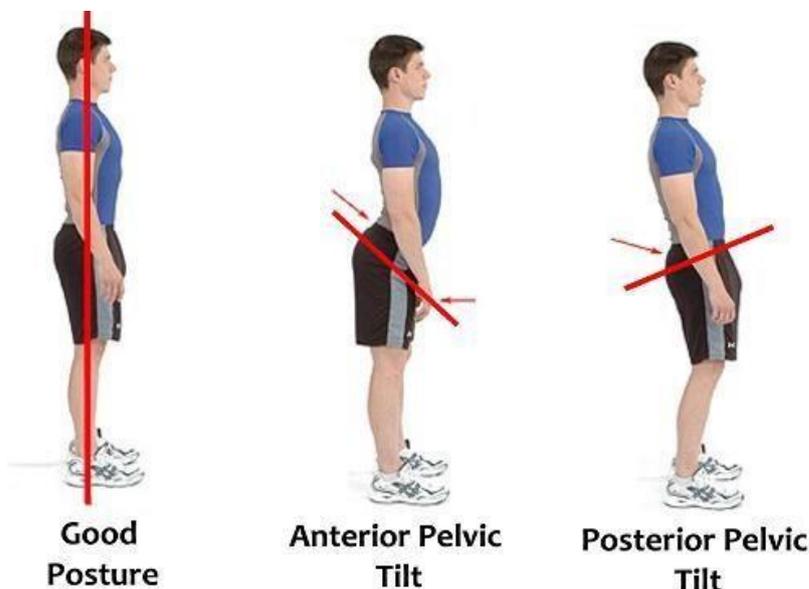
"Dysfunctional" in most cases of psoas issues means tight and/or weak. Most people have an anteriorly tilted pelvis (either 'normal' or excessive) and an associated lordosis in their lower spine. Excessive anterior pelvic tilt places the psoas and the muscles that make up our core in a position of mechanical disadvantage. When we need to flex the hip, the brain then signals other hip flexors that are not in a disadvantaged position to perform the movement. The problem is that the spine is not stabilised since these muscles do not attach to the spine

and also because our core muscles are at a mechanical disadvantage. Instability of the spine can cause segments to become stiff, resulting in pain.

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A twisted pelvis also places the psoas in a shortened position, resulting in weakness and tightness. Movement patterns and muscle tensions maintain the position of the pelvis, so mechanical adjustments are of limited effectiveness. Exercise is the key to 'un-twisting' the pelvis and should be guided by your physiotherapist.



The Cause of the Cause

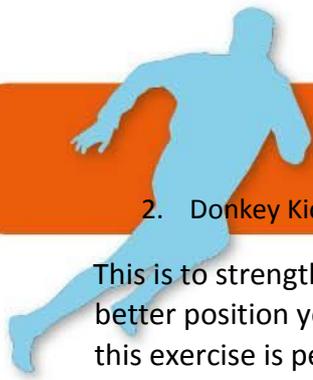
The above conditions arise due to muscle memory. The only exception is sacroiliac joint stiffness which commonly occurs after falling onto your bottom. The brain habitually calls on the muscles we use most and with the most neural connections to move the body. An example is quadriceps dominance in someone with a desk job. If we sit for long periods, we neutrally inhibit our glutes and cause a tension habit in our psoas to develop. Stretching can help to an extent, but re-training our muscle memory is the most effective way to restore function in psoas.

Exercises

1. Seated Knee Ups

Upper body position is vital! Activate your abdominal before and during this exercise. Start with 5x 10 sec hold on each leg. Avoid tensing your quad.





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2. Donkey Kicks

This is to strengthen your glutes to better position your pelvis. Since this exercise is performed with neutral and posterior pelvic tilt, you simultaneously achieve a stretch of the hip flexor. Start with 2x 10 kicks on each leg.



Starting Position



Ending Position

3. Knee Slides Against a Wall

This must be performed against a wall to take out other hip flexors such as tensor fascia lata. Keep your hip, side of the knee and heel against the wall throughout the movement. It's harder than it looks! Start with 2x 10 each side.



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