

INSPIRATION

H A W A I I ' S W E L L N E S S J O U R N A L

A JOURNAL
FOR THE
MIND, BODY
AND SPIRIT

An Ironman's Challenge
EPIC 5 - 5 Islands, 5 Days
Jason Patrick Lester
Rich Roll

Psoas Power
with YogAlign™
Michaëlle Edwards

Coming to Our Senses!
Activating Your
True Potential
Dr. Jane Ely



FREE



March / April 2010

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Our Philosophy: *Inspiration* is a reflection of the collective communities of Hawaii, the mainland and the world. It is a vehicle for holistic healers, for health, natural living, social and environmental professionals throughout Hawaii, to share their knowledge. We believe in cultivating an understanding of the body, mind and spirit in an effort to encourage the exploration of inner peace, harmony and balance.

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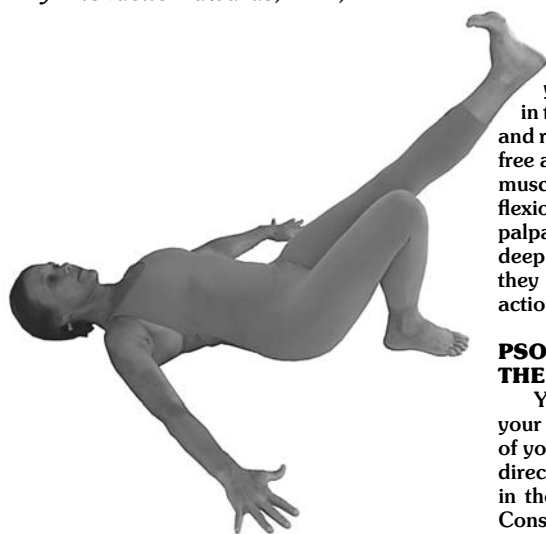
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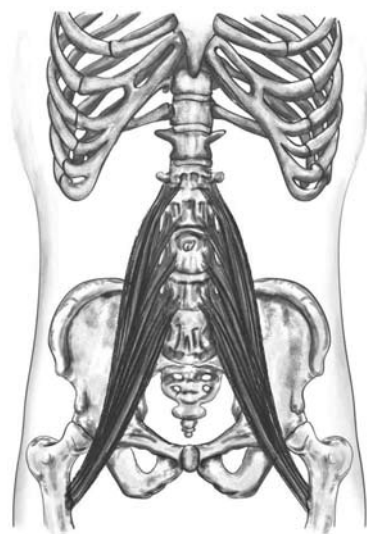
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Psoas Power with YogAlign™

By Michaele Edwards, LMT, ERYT



...there are more important power muscles that lie deeper, at the "core of your core"



Many people, when they refer to their core, are thinking of their abdominals, the four muscle groups that make up the trunk area between the ribs and hips. Having a tight six-pack or abs of steel is the goal of many fitness exercises, but there are more important power muscles that lie deeper, at the "core of your core." This inner core is comprised of your rarely discussed *psoas* (pronounced SO-AZ) muscle group. What and where exactly is your psoas group? What can knowing more about them do for you?

The psoas muscle group is commonly referred to as the groin muscle, but its reach and importance is far greater than that name suggests. Your psoas muscles run from a lumbar spine attachment, through the diaphragm, and down to the inside of your upper femur. They are the only muscles that connect your upper to your lower body. They are hip-flexors, guy wires, spine and pelvis stabilizers, breathing muscles, abdominal organ support, and often hold and define our emotions.

THE PSOAS MUSCLE GROUP

Famous body worker Ida Rolf taught that your psoas is the most important muscle group in the human body. Learning to activate, lengthen and relax this muscle group is key to becoming pain-free and truly "in your core." Unlike your quadricep muscles in your thigh or your bicep in your arm, flexion of the psoas cannot be seen directly and palpating the muscles is difficult because of their deep location. Many people have no idea that they exist and often lack body awareness of their action.

PSOAS IMBALANCE AFFECTS THE ENTIRE BODY

Your psoas play a crucial role in the curvature of your lower back and influence the tilt and position of your pelvis. Being the only muscles that connect directly to spinal discs, they are an obvious factor in the epidemics of lower back pain and sciatica. Constricted psoas muscles often combine with tight back muscles to either over-arch the lower spine, or flatten its natural curves (depending on the angle of your pelvis). Scoliosis can develop when one side of your psoas group is more contracted than the other. Sports like golf and tennis that emphasize one side of the body can imbalance your psoas group. Misalignment in the hips can cause pain to migrate and cause compression all over the body. Feet, knees, lower back, and even the neck and shoulders are all affected by hip displacement rooted in psoas imbalance.

Your psoas connect directly to your diaphragm muscle. Your diaphragm lines your inner ribs. Expanding your ribs during inhalation stretches the diaphragm laterally as it simultaneously engages downwards (assisted by the psoas), creating maximum space in the thoracic cavity. Tight or weak psoas can lead to restricted breathing and improper use of neck and shoulder muscles as primary, instead of secondary, breathing muscles, causing chronic muscle tension and signaling fascia thickening that leads to "glued" posture patterns.

When we sit for hours in a chair or car, the back of the chair often supports our spine in an unfavorable position, enabling dysfunctional patterning and weakening our core. Lacking core support causes peripheral muscles to take up the slack, often resulting in an overworked and sore outer body.

To overcome psoas restriction it is essential to develop a program for restoring psoas function. Movement, yoga poses and everyday sitting need to be done with psoas awareness. You can release your body into strong and stable natural alignment by learning to initiate movement using your psoas (your core) in combination with optimal breathing function.

Though abdominal crunches, or sit-ups, are the most common ab-strengthening exercise, over-tightening your outer belly will *override* your psoas function and actually make your trunk shorter in the front. Shortness in the front causes even more pull and pain in your back. Driven by the idea that tightening the stomach will fix a tight back, people become trapped in a muscular vise grip.

The following exercise will help you breathe length and extension into your spine, enabling full diaphragm expansion and strengthening your psoas core. It explores how breathing, combined with specific foot positioning and leg movements, aligns your spine and strengthens your inner core. Remember this: exhalation shortens the spine (think of coughing), therefore the YogAlign™ method encourages **INHALING** into flexion to maintain core extension.

EXERCISE: CORE CONNECTOR

This pose activates eccentric psoas action where muscles paradoxically lengthen as they contract. By lengthening and strengthening your psoas, you release tension in your lower back and gain muscles actions that stabilize your spine and sacrum. The single leg lifts of the Core Connector are initiated with a strong inhalation to create stabilization and elongation in your trunk muscles even though you are using your flexors. This will train your nervous system to tell your core muscles to work together as stabilizers with the psoas leading the way. Practicing the core connector will lengthen your waist eliminating your pot belly and providing space for your organs. Movements become dynamic and powerful when you practice the Core Connector. You will become pain-free in your lower back and acquire beautiful alignment and posture.

PSOAS POWER

*On your back, bend your knees with your feet hip width apart bringing your arms out to your sides in a V shape. Press your hand palms down with your fingers spread wide. Practice whole body awareness. Draw your shoulders away from your ears keeping the tips of your shoulder blades down. Keep your chin level with your forehead and use a small pillow if you feel neck tension. **Breathe like you are sipping in on a straw.***

*Inhalation is done through your mouth as though sipping in on a straw with strong movements of your rib cage muscles. Exhalation is done out the nose or mouth with a strong pulling in of the navel. The feet are kept pointed like a ballet dancer with your toes spread and drawn back towards the shin. Begin with either leg and begin to inhale when you lift your leg and exhale when you lower it about a foot off the floor. Press through the ball of your foot like you are stepping on a gas pedal. Inhale with the sipping breath as you bring your leg up and exhale as you bring your leg down. Practice lifting your leg 8 to 10 times feeling the **link between your psoas and diaphragm** by connecting your leg movement with breathing. There is no goal so only lift your leg as high as is comfortable. Keep your hips on the floor but maintain the curve in your lower back to avoid sacrum destabilization and lumbar disc pressure.*

Do a full body stretch afterwards and notice the difference in your two sides. Repeat the Core Connector on your other leg. Stay reclined on your back with your feet hip width apart and imagine the psoas area if filled with warm honey flowing from spine to your legs. ☪

Excerpted from Michaele Edwards' new book due out spring 2010
— Pain-free Yoga from your Inner Core. For more information visit:
www.manayoga.com or e-mail: manayoga@yahoo.com