

INJURY PREVENTION THE PSOAS MUSCLE

by Brad Hiskins, (Soft Tissue Therapist)

THE Psoas muscle (pronounced Soas) attaches to the anterior side of your lumbar spine (lower back), deep within your abdominal region. It is one of only two muscles in your body that attaches your spine to your limbs (the other being your Latissimus Dorsi or 'Lats', which attaches your spine to your upper arm). The Psoas crosses from your spine, deep through your abdominal cavity, until becoming quite superficial around your anterior hip, where it is joined by another deep hip flexor called your Iliacus – the two traveling together are then called your Iliopsoas. The Psoas then continues downward, again going deep, finally attaching to your femur (upper leg bone) deep within your groin.

Because the Psoas traverses many joints from your lower back to your upper femur, its actions are many. Predominantly however, it is a powerful hip flexor that raises your knee towards your chest. It may also externally rotate the upper leg. Although debatable, the psoas may also cause the lower back to become lordotic, causing increased curvature in the Lumbar spine.

Runners would be aware that this muscle can be the cause of many running aches and pains. There are numerous symptoms that a runner may present with that can indicate an unhealthy Psoas. There is no way I could list all the injuries that this muscle causes, but to give you an idea, this short list will help you on your way:

- The Psoas may become tight and immobile. This will limit your hip extension (when your leg trials behind you) and drag your lower back into lordosis. This results in putting you into a poor biomechanical running position and rendering you vulnerable to lower back pain and many other similar problems.
- When your hip stabilisers become fatigued (caused by long runs, a new training type or excessive load) it is suggested that your psoas becomes overactive in compensation. Again, this ends in a tight and immobile Psoas.
- The Psoas may become weak. As a therapist, this is often palpated as a thin, ropey Psoas with diminished size. A weak Psoas often feels dead and 'achy' in contrast to a healthy Psoas that usually feels full, bouncy and more acutely painful to palpate. Hence, don't be fooled when your therapist digs into your 'bad Psoas' and it feels better than the apparent good side.

How does a Therapist assess for an unhealthy Psoas?

There are length tests called 'Thomas tests' or 'modified Thomas Tests' that can compare sides, plus palpation techniques (feeling both sides to compare), in addition to some strength tests. This is usually enough to figure out what state your Psoas is in and what should be done about it.

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Fixing the problem

Home exercises for the Psoas are vital in keeping the muscle as mobile as possible. This is done by performing a modified hip flexor stretch that isolates the Psoas. This stretch is difficult and many struggle to do it and properly isolate the muscle.

- Start by getting yourself into a kneeling position with one knee on the ground (the Psoas to be stretched) and the other leg out in front (foot on the ground, hip and knee at 90 degrees flexion). See figure.
- Now squeeze your gluteals. This will posteriorly rotate your pelvis (tilt it backwards) and increase the possible stretch on the Psoas.
- Now gently lean backwards from your lower back – don't move your pelvis, only your lower back. Again this will help isolate your Psoas.
- Finally, slightly take your foot (on the stretching Psoas side) 'outwards' away from your body. This will internally rotate your hip and once again increase the possible isolation of a Psoas stretch.

It is probably more advisable to do this stretch lightly and regularly, rather than aggressively and for long periods, as the load on your lumbar spine may cause irritation to the joints in that region.

How do you know when your Psoas is weak? Get a health professional to test it for you. If deemed weak they can then suggest Psoas strength-exercises to rectify the problem. **R4YL**

Stretching the Psoas Muscle



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Full Name: Jaimee-Lee Hoebergen

Athletic Club: Wollongong Athletics

Age: 18

What / who is your greatest inspiration?

Running to reach the best of my ability.

Most memorable running moment?

Representing my country at the Commonwealth Games: stepping out into the packed stadium for the first time before my 400m heat and instantly seeing the crowd doing the Mexican wave.

Secret weapons that help you to perform your best?

Commitment and not giving up.

To unwind after a tough run, I'll...

Hang out with my fiancé, Ben.

If you could invite any three people to dinner?

Adam Sandler, Jamie Oliver (to cook...) & Carl Barron.

Highlight of your career so far?

Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Least favourite aspect of running competitively?

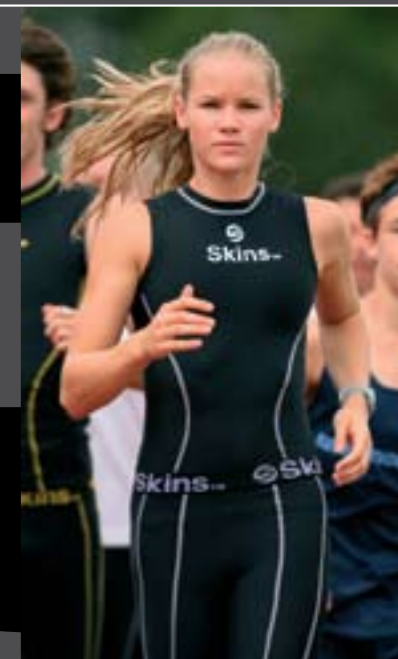
The commitment of having to train even when I'm not having a good day or am absolutely exhausted and not being able to participate and do certain sports and activities.

Best part of running competitively?

The friendships and experiences.

Passions outside of athletics?

When I have the time... cruising at the beach, bushwalking, church, reading, cooking and food, playing Monopoly, watching the Simpsons... anything really, as long as I'm with friends and having fun.



400m - 2006 Commonwealth Games

If you could be elite in any other sport?

Surfing or snowboarding.

Where will you be in 10 years time?

Achieving my goals, having a smile on my face and loving life.

The best athlete you have ever seen?

Michael Johnson

Your toughest running opponent?

When I was 15 racing against Cathy Freeman.

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