

Ep #62: The Psoas



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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Ep #62: The Psoas

Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

With this episode, I want to dig into your psoas. Now, I did an introductory type of episode back in episode number 14 around this time last year. And that one was really digging into the subtle, sacred, powerful concepts of the psoas, some of its esoteric nature blending in the DIMs and the SIMS that comes from the work of David Butler.

And the reason I want to return to the psoas is so to speak more directly to how to help you gain greater longevity if you have quick release techniques from a body worker, or from an IMS technique. Or something of that sort where you get some relief and it's often short term, and it doesn't last. And how can you lengthen out that short term gain that you gain from that release technique?

Because the reality is that so many people with issues in their psoas, they're long standing. And they can be really tricky to resolve for a lot of people. And I don't think it has to be tricky. They find themselves stretching their psoas in so many ways.

And they end up only having intermittent relief. And as I mentioned it could be like a really short time, like 15 minutes. Maybe two hours where they're feeling really good. Maybe two days, but then the pain or the strain comes back.

So think about it, if you've had this happen to you where you've had a release through the psoas, you've worked with a body worker, or a physiotherapist, or a chiropractor, or really the many different folks out there that work with the body in this way. And they've utilized a release technique and you've had some of this amazing, "Oh gosh, it feels so good and so much better." You feel taller, you feel lighter, and you feel more free.

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

Ep #62: The Psoas

But then, as I mentioned, it could be 15 minutes or two hours, maybe two days. And the strain or the pain comes back, sometimes it's even tighter. It's more pronounced to the point where you begin to wonder if this is just the way it's going to be. That you're going to have to resign yourself to relief, strain, relief, strain, relief, strain. It's just the cycle, it's just the way things are.

Maybe it's because you're this old or this is going on in your hips, or it's just the way it is. Maybe the psoas is just wonky, maybe it's tight and misbehaving. Maybe it's not cooperating or it's just plain bad.

So with this episode, I want to dig into a key missing element where if you think about it and interact with it and explore it, that psoas release work will last for longer and help you get to a place you really want to get and have much more sustainable results.

Something that will just make the process so much easier and integrative. And you get a lot of benefit from those folks who are doing those very specific release techniques. Because the fact is, is that your psoas release work did give you relief and I don't want to step over that one iota. Which means your system can have relief.

Let me say that again, the fact that your system, the fact that your body has experienced relief means you can have relief. Which might bring up some questions for you because it's like, "Well, then why doesn't it stay?" Aha, exactly. This is why we're doing this episode.

There's one last element that you need for longer term gains. One last element so that you have many more days of feeling spacious and good through your psoas with much less tension, more often, and with more freedom.

Now, just one note, before I get more into this is it does not matter which system or style of release work that you do. The key is when you are having the release work done, or rather the result of release work, if it's

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelly

Ep #62: The Psoas

positive. Like it gives you that freedom, that lightness, that ease, then there's an element of that release work that's definitely working.

Your body is responding to it, your mind is responding to it, your being is responding to it. Now the focus is on helping you have longer and more sustainable gains so that you get out of the vicious cycle of relief, strain, relief, strain, relief, strain.

So to get to the ultimate goal, let's first look at what the psoas actually is. So the psoas is a really long and strong muscle that cuddles into the lower half of your spine. And specifically it begins at the 12th thoracic vertebrae and snuggles along the five lumbar vertebrae and attaches onto the femur.

Now there are two other interesting pieces about the way that the psoas attaches. The first is, is that if you look really closely at any image of the psoas you'll see that it's not just one attachment point but it attaches to these each individual vertebrae.

So in essence, if you pull off of more specifically one vertebrae versus another, you actually have a different angle of pull. So some anatomists will say that it's not just one muscle, but it's six because there are these different attachment points and different angles of pull. So that's a curious idea to think about.

The other point is that it's the only muscle that connects your spine to your leg directly, and the other way around. It's the only one that bridges that spine to the leg. So in essence here, part of its job is to move the leg in the hip socket into hip flexion. And also to move the spine.

It's also a muscle that by some is described as a stabilizer of the spine, bridging the leg and the torso. And through this can create a connection that when it's functioning well, it can give you a sense of grounding and being centered. It's also a big reason why psoas release work is often a short term fix and not a long term sustainable change.

Ep #62: The Psoas

Part of a muscle's job is to absorb external and internal loads, to move our bones, and in turn move ourselves about in daily life. Now, when I say load, I want you to think about standing on a scale. There is you, your body weight, and gravity. The scale will read a number. Now add to this number the carrying of a child, or groceries, or a backpack, or maybe all of them.

The idea is that as you stand on that scale, the number will go up because the load is higher. There's more being asked of your muscle tissue to absorb and dissipate and shift and transfer. So now jump or run on the scale. And again, the number will go up because the force is higher, the load is higher.

That is all to say that in order for us to move about in our daily life, doing whatever it is that we do to move ourselves around, whether it's sitting to standing, or taking a step, or climbing stairs, whether it's errands or chores, childcare, fitness. It's the job, in part, of our muscles to absorb and disperse these loads to enable us to move.

And if for whatever reason that muscle tissue does not have the capacity or the bandwidth to be able to sustain the loads, or to absorb the stresses, or to dissipate, then its capacity is going to be reduced. Its abilities is going to be reduced.

Well then you might say well, isn't that when psoas release work is really really beneficial? Aha, yes, it can in the short term and you know it, particularly if you've had the release work done. You've experienced it, you've had the gains. And then comes the but.

Here is another wrinkle and a key reason why psoas release work is often short term and not long term sustainable change. Take your hands into a fist and I want you to hold those fists really, really, really tightly so there isn't any more room to squeeze. Think about how much tension is in there.

Okay, now think about how much you can like if you're going to – not that I want you to do this, but punch or if you're going to hit your fist on

Ep #62: The Psoas

something. The ability to absorb load into something that's holding so much tension is a bit more difficult.

Now unfist your hands and open them up and you'll probably feel some sensation as you open that hand up. It might be some achiness and some stiff feeling that dissipates as your hand comes back to its normal state.

So now think about this fist tension filled state and this open state as you're releasing it open and the achy, stiffy feeling that can come. Now think about your psoas. And remember that your psoas is a muscle that connects from your spine to your femur or thigh bone.

And as you're in standing or if you are walking, hiking, or climbing stairs, it is meant to be absorbing and moving the load from your upper to your lower body. And if it's constricted or contracted or twisted, or for whatever reason imbalanced, and then it starts to release, it's not going to be shifting the load as it could. And your system will find alternative muscles strategies or compensation patterns to get the job done.

So now you do your psoas release work and you'll have the relief. But you still have the alternative muscle strategies or compensation patterns, muscles doing work they're not supposed to. Muscles that are doing work they're not designed to do. And you still have the habitual memory of the psoas's previous position.

The point being that without retraining, that relief that you've gained, that relief work from the release technique, you will return back to your habitual patterning. And in order to make a change, to make something more sustainable, you have to change your habitual patterning and you need to shift up the compensation patterning in order to make that shift.

Otherwise, the habitual pattern won't change and your psoas's ability to absorb load, its ability to tolerate load won't change. And you will circle back into the vicious cycle of relief, strain, relief, strain.

Ep #62: The Psoas

There are two key areas that I like to focus on to support my clientele with retraining so that their psoas can regain and maintain that suppleness, regain its capacity to bear and dissipate load. And really help us through our day to day activity.

The first is to relax and be aware. Now I realize that sounds super obvious. But relaxing can be really challenging. It can be challenging to settle in through our nervous system. It can be challenging to take a breath. It can be challenging to just stop for a moment and bring the awareness to where the awareness needs to be brought to.

A lot of the compensatory or alternative muscle strategies that our systems come up with, as effective as they can be to get a job done, they're happening under our awareness. Which is why we often cycle around with strain and pain. It's because we're not actually addressing the issue that is.

And so when we can take a moment to relax and to grow our awareness, we can be more discerning at what's actually contributing to what's going on. With that is our breathing. And the breathing and the breathing work can be so effective in enabling us to settle down and to be aware.

The second place that I go to is into the body. Specifically to the shoulders and the hips. And the reason being is because the shoulders and hips are the largest joints in the body. And they're often highly correlated to these alternative muscle strategies or compensation strategies that are often utilized and are related to the psoas either being in the place that it is or not shifting to long term sustainable change.

Now, in the show notes you're going to find some sequences on YouTube for the shoulders and the hips as examples that you can use to explore your current state. For now, let's just explore though the pelvis and the hips and a movement pattern that you are familiar with, which is tree pose.

So think about your pelvis as a platform in which your leg bone moves. And remember, the leg bone is where that psoas attaches. So if your pelvis isn't

Ep #62: The Psoas

providing a great base of support then the leg bones probably not going to move as well as it could and that can translate into issues up into your psoas.

So think about it with tree pose. With tree pose we want to have that pelvis to be quiet. And as the leg moves into flexion, and a little bit of rotation, and as it comes up the foot slides up the leg because the foot's sliding up because of what's going on up in through the hip.

Oftentimes, people are moving their pelvis or they're hiking their pelvis or hiking their hip. They're doing all sorts of things in and around the pelvis because of what's not happening between the leg bone and the pelvis.

So something you can do just as a really easy first step is as you move into tree, can you keep your pelvis quiet? Can you do that movement without utilizing your hands at all? Without bracing or gripping through your toes or your foot. Without gripping intently in through the pelvic floor. Without bracing through your abdomen. Without pushing that standing foot into the floor. Without hyper extending that standing leg knee.

Can you just allow that leg, the standing leg to get stronger, feeling that foot on the floor, moving the light bone in the hip socket super, super easy? And see what happens. And you'll likely discover some things about how you move that maybe you weren't aware of before. And that's an area where you can begin to play and explore.

The other area that I mentioned that I like to go to is the shoulder girdle. And so often when people raise their arms overhead, whether they're going into warrior one, or maybe they're coming into downward dog, oftentimes their back will move into extension. So it's like going into a back bend and their rib cage will move, we often call it the ribs flaring.

Then they realize this or they're cued by another professional, fitness professional, yoga professionals, Pilates person, and they'll say, "I want you to pull those ribs down." And then what ends up happening is in the act

Ep #62: The Psoas

of pulling the ribs down, there is more tension that's developed in the upper part of their abdomen.

Well guess where your psoas attaches? It's attaching to the top part of your lumbar in the upper part of the abdomen. And it's often times where there can be some more tension being held.

So now think back to your fist, how well can you absorb load if you're holding tension? And then add to that how that's impacting with your breath. And what's happening with your breath and how that's going to impact your ability to relax.

Because in that area where you're pulling those ribs down is your diaphragm. And if you don't let that diaphragm move, then your ability to breathe becomes a bit more limited.

So the bottom line here is this, that the release work that you're doing with your physio, your massage therapist, your osteopath, your chiro, cranial sacral therapist, really anybody out there who's doing the work around some psoas release, it's good work particularly. And specifically, if you're actually getting benefit from it, like if you are getting some relief, it means that your body can release, which is good.

Now, if you find yourself 15 minutes, two hours, two days later, find your going right back to where you were, then you're wanting likely more sustainable gains. And if you want that you're going to need to retrain your habitual patterns so that your psoas can actually do its job better. So it can return to being a champ at absorbing and dispersing load, and then letting other structures that are compensating to settle out and they can start doing the job they're meant to do.

This is what it is to build functional synergy. Better whole body mechanics, better breath, better awareness, better connection.

Ep #62: The Psoas

Now, if this has really resonated with you then do go into the show notes, find those links on YouTube, take a look at those sequences to explore. And if you want to dig into this further, you are going to love, love, love the therapeutic yoga intensive that's coming up and you will want to dig into and explore your movement. And then see how you can use this exploration of movement and relaxation and mind body connection in a whole new way.

If you're a teacher you'll be able to explore with your students too. I would love to see you there. For information just send us a note at health@functionalsynergy.com. Take good care.