

Psoas, Instinctive Responses & The Healthy Pelvis

by Liz Koch on November 1, 2011



The psoas muscle is part of our instinctive fear response. Whether or not it is falling in love or propelling through space, the dynamic psoas surrenders deep within our core. All unresolved fear is communicated through the psoas and directly affects the pelvis. When we feel our integrity is compromised, it is the constricted psoas that plays havoc on our breath and the natural positioning of the pelvis.

The psoas is embedded within the deepest layer of connective tissue (in the sympathetic neuro-core bag along with the spinal cord and kidneys) emerging to connect spine to legs. Although the psoas has been thought to serve the spine as a guide wire creating stabilization, its main job is to message subtle changes in weight, location, and safety.

The psoas bridges the belly enteric brain, central, and autonomic nervous systems. The large nerve ganglion located within the belly core going to the digestive and reproductive organs passes over, embeds into, and through the psoas. Serving as messenger of the core our psoas translates and transmits all expressions of safety, harmony, and integrity; signaling whether or not we are centered and congruent or encumbered and vulnerable.

Two nerve innervations activate the psoas. Sensing the lower psoas crossing over the hip socket articulates the leg from the trunk, sexual expression, and pelvic movement. Sensing the upper psoas articulates the expression of the diaphragm and the integral gut emotions of courage, will, and self-actualization. The healthy psoas, rather than functioning segmented at each individual joint attachment, functions as one integrated and coherent whole.

How vital the psoas is profoundly influences every aspect of our health. If the psoas is called upon to support structural misalignment, its suppleness is curtailed and over time this dynamic tissue dries and shrinks. If consistently used as a structural or emotional support, its expressiveness will diminish.

When the pelvis is off center and the SI joint ligaments have micro-tears or are over-stretched due to physical force, falls, surgery, or accidents the psoas will become engaged to help limit movement in an attempt to maintain core integrity. When there is pelvic damage the psoas takes over for the lack of SI joint function and eventually shortens pulling the pelvis forward, down, and further off center.

Recognizing the difference between pelvic instability and emotional holding patterns can be experienced in the constructive rest position (CRP). While in CRP if we can let go of our tension patterns and the psoas releases, but as soon as we stand up the psoas immediately compensates and we know it is an indication that there is instability within the pelvic basin. However when the

tension patterns become more exaggerated while in CRP it suggests that we may have a level of traumatic response within our system. It is also possible to have both simultaneously. Exploring our instinctive fear responses both while in CRP and in other positions helps resolve the emotional holding while releasing the dry psoas. Whereas reestablishing ligament tone and a centered pelvis involves being actively involved in eliminating activities that undermine pelvic balance while establishing excellent ergonomic patterns. Both are essential steps toward healing.

The psoas expresses our deepest fear playing a major role in the survival instincts of fight, flight, or freeze and in women our urge to tend and mend. Fear is a healthy survival response helping us sense danger and respond appropriately. When we are in danger, it is our psoas that notifies us to pay close attention readying us to quickly move away, stand our ground, or take cover. In sync with large extensor muscles, the psoas prepares us for running or kicking and in accordance with large flexor muscles protects us by curling and rolling. Becoming somatically conscious of these instinctive responses while maintaining a juicy dynamic psoas helps us respond appropriately to current life situations that may or may not be life affirming. We may need to stand our ground, voice our needs, or leave. Recognizing primitive responses helps us make wise decisions in support of ourselves.

One of our primitive instinctive responses is Fetal. When we were embryos our organism grew in a fetal C-shape curled safely inside our mother's wombs. Once on land we began a process of unfolding out of fetal into the world around us. When we fall off a roof or out of tree this instinctive curl is ignited as we roll up into a ball. Rolling into fetal-C protects vital organs and the soft vulnerable parts of our body while providing resiliency to the spine helping us sustain the blow or fall. Another primitive instinctive response specific to the psoas is stimulated by our proprioceptive system located within the inner ear. Startle (Moro reflex) is elicited by loud noises or quick shifts in spatial movement, as the newborn infant arches back in preparation for reaching out, calling out for help, grabbing hold, and if all else fails, falling/rolling into fetal.

Working intentionally with our instinctive fear responses helps us access a healthy psoas for which our inner sense of integrity and harmony depend upon. It is by exploring simple positions such as constructive rest position (CRP), fetal-C, and startle that we can sense these instincts within a powerful primitive midline and develop conscious choice and self-empowerment.

Use the constructive rest position (CRP) for creating neutrality in the core and increasing somatic awareness of internal coherency. Simply rest each day in the CRP to revitalize and prepare for daily activities. CRP is adapted from Mabel Todd and Lulu Sweigard's somatic work in the 1930s. Coined constructive this easy position releases the psoas as well as awakens awareness of the instinctive responses. It is restful as lying down decreases muscular and neurological excitation and habitual tension patterns. When we feel the fear response while in CRP we know it is inappropriately ignited. Recognizing the instinctive responses frees us to work with them consciously rather than dissociate or react to accommodate their activation.

The best time to spend in CRP is in the morning, before dinner, and after the workday ends. Do not rest in CRP just before going to bed as some people experience a surge of energy after being in CRP that may prevent sleep. Other beneficial times to explore CRP include just before and after sports, yoga, exercise, or any movement activity.

Exploring Constructive Rest Position



What You Will Need: a quiet, safe, and comfortable place to work; a blanket or carpeted floor; a sticky mat (optional) and if needed a regular size bath towel. Choose a floor space that is carpeted or use a flat folded blanket the length of your torso and head (from your coccyx to and including your skull should all fit on the blanket). The feet can be on the blanket, sticky mat, or floor.

Where To Begin: lie on your back, knees bent at a 45-degree angle, feet flat on the floor. Separate your feet and your knees the width of your hip sockets (see hands -located on the front of the pelvis). Let your bones rest. Your skeleton is neutral: this means your head should be in alignment with your whole spine tilted neither forward toward the chest nor backward toward the floor, your pelvis, lumbar and cervical vertebrae are neutral and in relationship with the rest of the spine (do not tuck, hold, or press).

The function of the towel is to support the head, but only if needed. The head rests at the same level as the spine and pelvis. If your head falls back behind the spine, place the well-folded flat towel with the thickness needed (no thicker than 1 1/2 inches) just under your head. You may need far less – just one fold may be enough to allow the cervical vertebrae to be neutral. Place the towel under the upper half of the skull, not under the neck. Do not bunch the towel or use a pillow. Align your legs, knees and feet the width of your hip sockets. If your feet slip, use the sticky mat under your feet to give them a firm hold. Let your arms rest along your sides, on top of your pelvis, or crossed over your chest. Your eyes remain open and soft in their sockets.

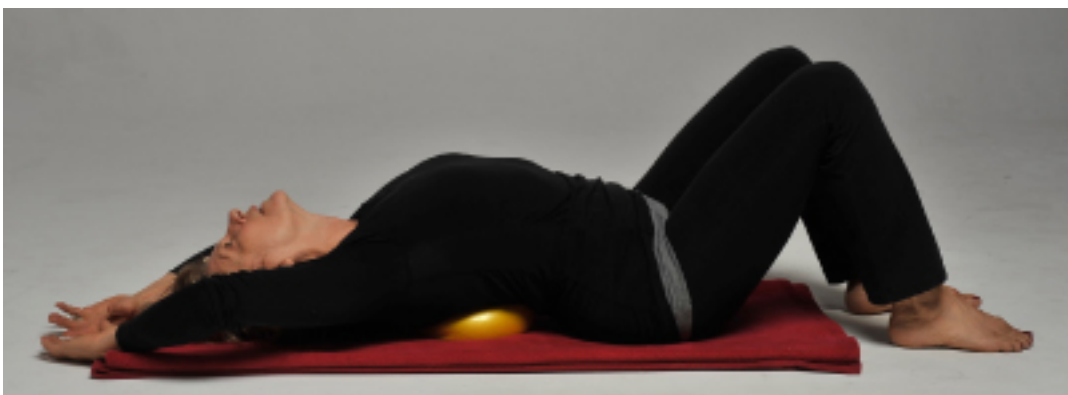
Exploring Primordial Fetal C (Curling)



What You Will Need: folded blanket, carpeted floor, or bed.

Where To Begin: roll out of constructive rest on to your side creating the spinal Fetal-C shape from head to tail. Simply rest on your side and notice your sensations, feelings, and thoughts. To explore movement begin by gently rocking for 30-60 seconds and then pause. Again feel how your spine responds, your sensations, feelings, and thoughts. The primordial spine is an ancient fish and will begin moving as it awakens. Use slow rocking, wave-like motion, and undulations from head to tail and tail to head as well as lateral fish movements to stimulate, hydrate, and activate the primordial midline. Periodically add a long “shhhhh” on the long exhale while taking long pauses between initiating any movement or sound. Simply be in open attention to what ever is unfolding.

Exploring Startle Response (Arcing)



What You Will Need: folded blanket and/or carpeted floor as well as a soft inflatable ball.

Where To Begin: using CRP as your starting point, place a soft deflated ball under your back at the height of the solar plexus. This is the back of the upper psoas and approximately at the twelfth thoracic vertebra (T12) the last rib. The ball should not feel imposing. Arms are over the head and the eyes follow the movement of the arms so that the chin is up, the throat is open, allowing the natural arcing to begin.

This exploration involves movement, an expression of surprise, preparation for reaching, and activates the sympathetic response for rolling, jumping, and running. When activated it is possible to sense all the large muscles of the front of the body contract pulling toward the navel (like a spring readying to release).

Begin by allowing the ribs to have weight and resting on the ball. Use a 3 long hard “sssss” snake sound on a long exhaling breath, emptying the lungs, and stimulating the respiratory diaphragm. Please do not over do! Remove the ball and rest in CRP before rolling over and slowly getting up when ready. Do not make any fast or flexion-like movements rather walk around until acclimated.

Instinctive responses can save our life as we jump back from an on coming car, be adrenaline driven to run for our life, or lift the truck to save a life. They are vital for survival and for our capacity to self-actualize and become who we truly are. By working with our dynamic psoas we hone our capacity to be alert and responsive rather than defensive and simply have knee-jerk reactions. Reestablishing a supple core by cultivating a supple psoas and the instinctive responses becomes fertile soil for growing a responsive, open hearted un-defensive being.

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