

Jo Ann Staugaard-Jones, MA

# The Secret Muscles That Cause Chronic Pain

**M**ost people have heard plenty about the core—that band of muscles in the abdomen, low back, hips and pelvis. But what if there were some far less well-known muscles that could be causing all your trouble? Say hello to the *psaos* (pronounced SO-as) muscles! Ignoring these crucial muscles can lead to low-back pain and poor posture.

*What you need to know to keep your psaos muscles in good shape...*

## WHERE ARE THEY?

Located deep within the central body, the psaos muscles are the only muscles that connect the upper and lower extremities of your body—as a pair of muscles on both the right and left sides, they run from the lower spine, past the front of the pelvis, through either side of the groin and attach to the inside of the femurs (thighbones).

So what exactly do these muscles do? The psaos muscles help with the transfer of weight when you're walking or running. When you extend your leg back, for example, the psaos on that side lengthens... when you lift your knee, it contracts. The psaos muscles also act as stabilizers of the lower spine, the pelvis and the legs, aiding body alignment and posture.

**WHAT GOES WRONG:** If the psaos muscles are shortened for long periods of time—as occurs when sitting, for example—they can tighten on one or both sides. If the psaos on one side of the body is tighter than the other (from leaning to one side while sitting, for example), it can also torque the spine, affecting your posture and gait. An imbalance on one or both sides can lead to inflammation and pain while walking.

Unlike toned abs, you can't see

the psaos muscles. Because you can't touch your psaos muscles either, it can be difficult to tell if they're the cause of your back pain and poor posture.

There are some clues, however, that may indicate that these muscles are tight or weak—for example, you may also feel discomfort in the hip sockets, the glutes or even the sacroiliac joints, which are in the back of the pelvis. The pain can be in one spot or travel throughout the path of the muscle.

## KEEPING YOUR PSAOS MUSCLES IN SHAPE

The first step to keeping the psaos muscles in top shape is to stand up. Instead of sitting for prolonged periods of time, get up and move around at least every hour. To help prevent or relieve psaos-related pain, also do the following three stretches every other day...

**STRETCH #1: Lunge.** Also known as the “runner's stretch,” the lunge lengthens and stretches the psaos muscles.

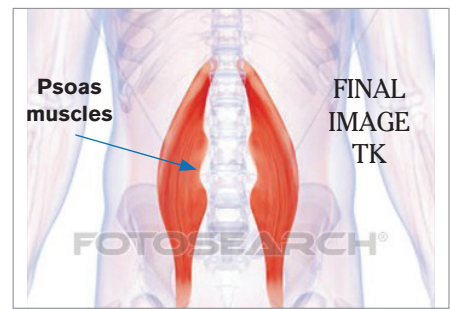
**WHAT TO DO:** Stand with your left foot forward and right leg back (about three to four feet apart). Bend your front knee until it's directly



over your toes, at about a 90-degree angle. Slide your right leg straight back

until it's almost parallel to the floor. Keep your feet facing forward and don't let your front knee extend beyond your toes. Your spine should be straight, and you can rest your hands on the floor or the front of one thigh. Hold for up to 30 seconds, then repeat on the other side.

**STRETCH #2: Teaser or Boat pose.** This position, used in both



Pilates and yoga, works the psaos muscles and several other core muscles.

**WHAT TO DO:** Sit on the floor with your legs extended out in front. While keeping your hands on the floor behind your hips, lean back slightly and balance just behind your “sits” bones (beneath your



buttocks). Then gently raise one leg and then the other as high as

possible, so that your body is in a “V” position. Hold for 10 seconds while keeping your chest lifted and your torso long. If you're able, extend your arms forward for added challenge. Repeat three times, or hold longer.

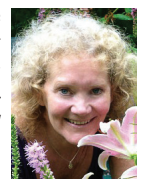
**STRETCH #3: Windmill.** This exercise strengthens and stretches the psaos muscles and oblique (side abdominal) muscles.

**WHAT TO DO:** While standing with your arms extended out to each side and your knees slightly bent, lean forward and touch your right hand to your left ankle as you extend your left arm upward and look up toward the ceiling. Return to the original standing position and repeat on the other side. Do five reps, without rushing, for maximum benefit. [BLH](#)



*Bottom Line/Health* interviewed...

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