

SHORT SEQUENCE TO
RELEASE THE PSOAS

A Master Class with Sandra Anderson



THE PRACTICE

Tightness or discomfort in the psoas can often be an indicator of tension elsewhere in the body, anxiety, or pent-up internal stimulation.

Cultivating deep presence is the first step toward releasing the psoas and relieving pain. Use your breath awareness and your conscious intention to relax the mind and body, and to allow this deep presence to arise. This will pacify the psoas, so that it relaxes and releases.



Begin in a *savasana* (corpse pose) modification, with a bolster under your knees to allow the psoas to relax.

Soften the back side of your body. Let the rib cage drop into the mat and the back to rest on the floor.

Let go of any effort in your body, breathing, and mind. Release any judgment about whether you're doing the practice correctly.

Allow your awareness and breath to drop deeper into the body.

APANASANA

(DRAW ONE KNEE TO THE CHEST)

Hands wrapped behind the knee and around the back of the thigh.

Soften your back ribs toward the floor.

Notice your breath. Does it indicate any deeper tension that may be stuck in this area?

If you'd like to increase the depth of the stretch, lift your hips and pull the bolster underneath your pelvis and sacrum (but not your lower back).

You may be able to extend the opposite leg. If so, keep your extended leg active by pushing through the heel.

For an even more energetic option, do this against a wall, so that the heel of your extended leg is pushing against it.

Gently, smoothly release and draw the other knee up and repeat on the other side.

Finally, lift the hips and draw the bolster out from underneath you. Then lower your hips to the mat.

WINDSHIELD WIPER POSE

(DROPPING THE KNEES FROM SIDE TO SIDE)

Separate the feet about mat-width (or perhaps not quite that wide, if your legs tend to be shorter).

Gently lower the knees to one side.

Bring your knees back to center and take them to the other side.

Windshield-wiper your knees back and forth as many times as feels right to you.

ABDOMINAL WORK

The next exercise activates the deep abdominal muscles, so that the musculature responsible for stabilizing the pelvis and the lumbar spine is engaged. This frees the psoas so that it can properly flex the hip joint.

Bring the right knee to the chest, holding it behind the knee with the right hand.

Bring the left hand behind the head to support the head and neck.

Create resistance by pushing the leg away from you while pulling the hand toward you, actively pushing the thigh into the hand.

Roll up, lifting your shoulder blades and upper body.

Extend the left leg on the floor. Reach out through the heel, which creates a nice, long opening across the psoas and groin area, as well as engagement in the deeper abdominal muscles.

You might also lift the extended leg an inch or two.

Relax and breathe, even as your muscles are active.

Come out by bringing both feet to the floor and repeat on the other side.

Afterward, draw your knees to your chest and rock side to side slightly, to relieve any residual strain in the lower back.

EKA PADA RAJAKA POTASANA

(HALF PIGEON POSE)

Roll onto your right side and come onto your hands and knees for a variation of *eka pada rajakapotasana* (half pigeon pose) that lengthens the psoas. This version also neutralizes the external hip rotators, so that the tightness you often feel in your outer hip, which prevents you from getting a stretch in your psoas, is removed.

Draw your left knee forward, so that you are on your shin, and place it to the inside of the left hand.

Slide the right foot down the mat, so that the heel of the left foot is underneath the left hip.

Align the left shin and foot so that they are parallel with the long edge of the mat.

If you feel any strain in the knee, come out of this variation and turn the lower leg to come into a standard half pigeon pose, with the shin parallel to the short edge of the mat. You can also come into a low or high lunge, or skip the pose entirely, if needed.

Walk your fingertips back toward your hips, so that there's a strong lift up through the front of the body. Rather than curling into a tight "ball," the psoas is now opening from both the top and bottom ends. This allows the pelvis to move down. The position of the legs also stabilizes the pelvis and allows you to lift straight up out of it.

Wherever you need to, stop walking your fingers back. You may not be able to come upright entirely. For a modification, you can also put blocks under your hands to aid you.

Your goal is to find that edge between resistance and softening, not to master a particular position. Coax the releasing of this deep muscle, rather than trying to bully it into position.

Aim for just enough engagement so that you can soften while the muscle is active. When you reach that point, you may be able to move in a little deeper and engage a little bit more.

To come out, fold forward and return to your hands and knees, or into *adho mukha svanasana* (downward facing dog), if you prefer. Then step into the pose again, this time drawing the right knee forward.

Remember that it's natural to experience a difference from side to side.

When you're ready to come out, come into child's pose or downward facing dog.

ANJANEYASANA

(LOW LUNGE)

Come back to your hands and knees for *anjaneyasana*, which will help open the groin.

Step the right foot forward, with the ankle under the knee for stability.

Fold your hands over your thigh and press into the thigh (alternately, you can press your hands into blocks, one on either side), which will help you lift up through the core of the body.

Be careful not to push out the upper chest. Instead, engage in diaphragmatic breathing and allow your breath to move deep down into the core of the body.

To get more lengthening in the upper part of the psoas, you can also sweep the arms out to the side and up alongside the head.

If you're tempted to throw your chest forward, breathe into the back ribs so the back body stays energized. Then you can stretch up through the arms, lifting the torso off the pelvis as the pelvis drops down.

When you're ready, exhale the arms out to the side and down.

To change sides, move into child's pose or down dog, whichever neutralizes tension in the hip, knee, ankle, and spine.

Repeat on the other side.

Step back into child's pose or downward facing dog.

SALABHASANA

(LOCUST POSE)

Lie prone on the belly, hands down, forehead down or chin touching the ground.
(If your neck hurts, you should have your forehead down).

Bend the right knee, so your foot is in the air. Lift the thigh and press the foot to the ceiling, maintaining a right angle between the calf and the thigh.

Keep the sole of the foot facing toward the ceiling.

Keep the knee lifted directly up so it's not abducting out to the side, but rather staying right in line with the hip.

It may not feel as though there's much movement and, depending on how tight your psoas is, you may not get any movement at all; but there is still a lot going on in the pelvis. The right side is engaged and the right side of the hip, the pelvis, and the gluteus maximus are lifting.

Relax the opposite side as it engages sympathetically. This relaxation provokes a deep realignment in the pelvis.

Lower the thigh and lift it again. Do this three to five times, keeping the pelvis on the floor.

Let that leg relax and try the other side.

COUNTER POSE

To counter any pelvic tension, remain prone with the forehead down and bend both knees, feet in the air.

Gently lower both feet to one side and then the other, windshield-wiping them from side to side. Do this slowly, so you notice what is happening in the pelvis.

Let the pelvis move with the legs.

Then, keeping knees bent, separate the shins and open the legs out to the sides. Now, draw the legs toward one another and cross the ankles. Do that a few times, reversing which ankle is in front.

Sit back in child's pose. Breathe into your lower back and lower belly, arms resting alongside to relieve any tension in the shoulders. If child's pose is uncomfortable for you, roll over and draw your knees to the chest.

Roll over and lie down in *savasana*. Then bend your knees and drop them from side to side a few times.

SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA

(BRIDGE POSE)

Step your feet closer to the pelvis, about hip-width apart, and place your hands down by your sides as you prepare for *setu bandha sarvangasana*.

Lift the pelvis. Peeling the spine off the floor, continue to lift.

Engage your inner thighs. Keep the thighs parallel and don't let the knees splay out.

Press the sacrum into the body. Lift the pelvis high.

Roll down one vertebra at a time into the mat, if that's possible. Then soften the whole spine and allow the lower back to come to its natural position.

FINAL SAVASANA (CORPSE POSE)

Slip the bolster under your knees again for final *savasana*. Using the bolster ensures that the psoas does not become re-aggravated.

Feel the lower back dropping deeper into the floor. Allow the whole pelvis and lower back to relax.

Sense the back of your body.

Bring your attention to the back of the head, the shoulder blades, the back ribs, and down into the pelvis.

Feel the weight of the legs and how the legs are supported by the bolster.

Soften the mouth, jaw, eyes, face, base of the skull, and front of the throat.

When the body feels soft and the limbs have grown longer and heavier, think about the spine growing longer as well, so the back of the spine has a more intimate relationship with the floor.

Soften the whole spine down into the floor. All of the energy of the front of the body will come settling down into the rest of the body, and the breath will become more subtle.

Do not force the breath in any way. Notice if there is tension and holding in the breath, and allow the body to soften around that. Bring your attention to the place where the body and breath meet. Allow the body to soften in that interface.

You can stay here for 10 to 15 minutes, if you like, with your attention on the breath.