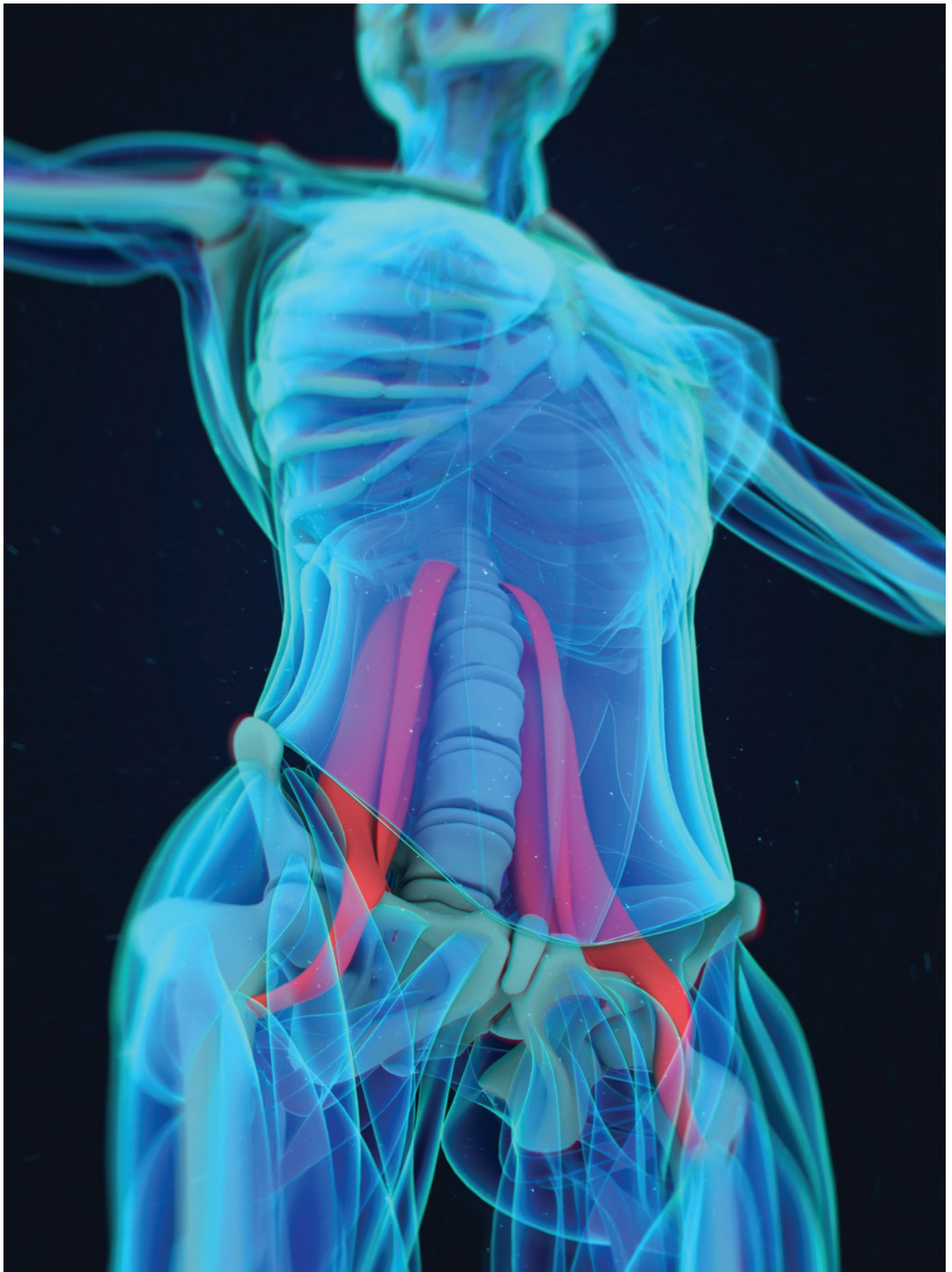




THE MIGHTY PSOAS

A detailed exploration of one of the body's major muscles: the magical and mighty psoas. *By Sandra Carson*

Some years ago, at the end of a regular vinyasa yoga class, something remarkable happened. As I prepared my students for relaxation, I moved them into softer reclined hip release poses after an intense yoga class. I dimmed the lights in the room, instructed some gentle releasing poses, and guided my students back to their soft, natural breath. As the energy slowed down and became heavier, and they began letting go of their efforts, they sank deeper into their bodies. It was then that I noticed something unusual. A few bodies starting to move, waving, trembling in their hips and legs. The students did not seem to be doing anything themselves, it was their bodies moving independently, on their own accord. Looking over to one student I saw she had become visibly emotional, tears rolling down her cheeks. When I checked in with her, she shared that she felt sad, and assured me she was fine.

You may recognise yourself in this story, as a teacher or as a student of yoga. The experience of independent movement in your body can trigger emotions and memories from the past. This can be experienced as a shaking or trembling, deep in your pelvis. If you have ever felt this, you may have just been in touch with your beautiful and mighty psoas.

The significance of the psoas

The psoas muscle is one of the most fascinating muscles in the human body. It is a true connector in the whole sense of the word and therefore a real 'yogic' muscle. The psoas is of paramount importance in the physical body, as well as in the emotional and energetic body as well. In the physical body, it relates to healthy and balanced posture, stiffness in the hips and the spine. In the emotional body, the psoas greatly determines the ability to relax and influences feelings of wellbeing. As an energetic body connector, the psoas is the ally of a natural and healthy breath. An awakened, relaxed and juicy psoas enables the free flow of subtle energy and aids in increased sensitivity in the whole body.

No matter what you do, you can bet that your psoas is involved in almost every action and movement of the body throughout the

day. Even your feelings and thoughts can be linked to it! The psoas attaches your upper body to your lower body: it is the only muscle that connects your spine to your legs. When your psoas is 'awake', it instills a feeling of stability. It is also deeply involved in freedom of movement in walking (and practicing yoga). Your diaphragm is subtly yet deeply linked to the psoas, and to a large extent the tone of the psoas reflects your emotional state and the state of your mind. As a muscle of conscious evolution, the psoas connects you to both the earth and the sky, expressing and manifesting your growth and evolution as a human being.

The anatomical psoas

Depending on which muscles you include, the number of psoai (the plural of psoas), differs. The psoas complex consists of four muscles: a psoas major and a psoas minor on each side of the body. Because of our evolutionary development, growing from all fours into upright beings, the function of the psoai have changed as well. The psoas minor muscle is slowly turning into a tendon and may be disappearing completely; many people only have one psoas minor or none at all.

The insertion of the psoas major is on the vertebrae of the lumbar spine. It connects to all the vertebral bodies and intervertebral discs of the low back all the way up to T12, where your lower ribs begin. Without attaching to it, the psoas runs through the pelvis and attaches to the inner upper thigh bone at the lesser trochanter. The psoas complex is often mentioned as 'the iliopsoas' muscle because the psoas shares the same attachment at the thighbone with the iliacus muscle. However, the function of psoas is different from the iliacus. The origin of the iliacus is on the inside of the pelvic rim and it assists hip flexion at the pelvis. The iliacus is not involved in movement that flexes or extends the spine (bending forward or backwards).

Because the psoas runs through but is not attached to the pelvis, the influence of the psoas on pelvic alignment is not easy to measure. And since there are two separate psoai, they can be, and often are, of different lengths. They have the power to cause tilts, shifts and rotations in the pelvis, and can be involved in causing sacroiliac and other pelvic issues and back problems, ranging from the pelvis upward, sometimes even all the way up to the neck. The effect on the low back is direct and immediate, either pulling the lower back into lordosis, a deeper inward curve, or doing the opposite, pulling the low back flat. Either way, when the low back is out of alignment, the rest of the spine will be indirectly but profoundly affected by the psoas. The psoas is one of the strongest muscles in your body, and the effect and influence of the psoas on the internal structure of your body is significant.

“The psoas is of paramount importance in the physical body, as well as in the emotional and energetic body as well. In the physical body, it relates to healthy and balanced posture, stiffness in the hips and the spine.”

Tightness or imbalance in the tone of the psoas can have physical effects, but can also have many other often overlooked ways of manifesting in your life. When your psoas is chronically cramped, it can lead to a host of seemingly unrelated issues that are often the effect of overstimulation or exhaustion. Tension in your psoas may show up in your body in one or more of the following ways: difficulty focusing, sitting still or relaxing; irritability, sadness, anger, problems falling asleep or sleeping well; digestive issues; fatigue and more.

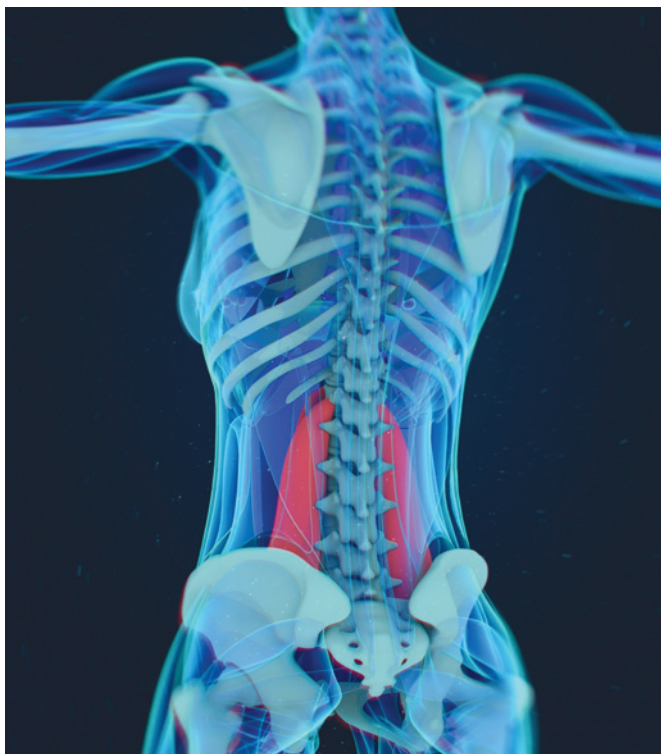
How toned, or how supple and strong your psoas is, greatly influences the shape of your pelvis and spine. And the tone of your psoas can be related to a host of other issues that inhibit the quality of your life. At least two major factors have a determining influence on the tone or amount of tension in the psoas: your habitual posture and movement and tension or trauma in your body.

How does the psoas get cramped?

Tension in your psoas from a habitual source stems from the type of activity or inactivity that you engage in. In today's world, we tend to engage in organised (sport) activities that are planned at certain times during the week instead of moving moderately throughout the day. Lack of diverse movement or overworking certain muscle groups can distort the balance in muscle tone in your body.

This imbalance can be especially evident in people who isolate muscles during intense workouts or weight lifting. The focus on training specific muscles rather than the body as a whole stimulates muscle domination in certain muscles and muscle groups. This muscle imbalance occurs with many sports, such as intensive cycling and mountain climbing, where the front body muscles are worked out more dominantly than the back body muscles. In these cases, the front body muscles and hip flexors, especially the psoas muscle, develop and adapt to a permanent contracted state, and have the tendency to cause back problems as the shortened psoas pulls continuously on the spine.

The psoas can also shorten through inactivity. Whenever you bend from the hips, in hip flexion, the tone of your psoas decreases.



The psoas is like a piece of strong elastic rope: when you stand up straight, the rope is taut. When you bend from your hips, it slacks. So whenever the hips are in flexion, your psoas relaxes and shortens. This happens every time you are sitting, driving a car and even sleeping on your side. When your body is habitually positioned in a certain posture, often for hours on end, this posture becomes the standard and the musculature and connective tissues will adapt to this shape. So when you sit for such long periods of time, your psoas will shorten to adjust. This is important, given the fact that recent studies show that people sit on average 12 hours a day!

Aligning and feeling the psoas

Tightness in the body stems largely from tightness in the myofascia, the type of connective tissue which runs through the muscles. When your muscles feel tight, it is not really your muscles that become 'stiff', but instead the connective tissue in the muscle that stiffens up. With the psoas, it is a different story. When the psoas responds to stress, it is the muscle itself that gets tight. And depending on how you stretch your psoas, you relieve the tension or make it worse!

Alignment of your psoas muscle in yoga poses can either serve your psoas or increase the cramped state of the muscle. It is vital that yoga students practice psoas stretches with an aligned psoas while activating or releasing support muscles. Especially the transverse abdominus and the gluteus medius are key players in successful stretching. If you don't align and activate, you inadvertently end up 'hanging in your psoas' or bypassing it completely. This happens particularly in poses that create extension in the hip and extension of the spine. Lunges like anjaneyasana and other back bending poses, especially the more complex hip opening back bends like eka pada rajakapotasana, can have a negative effect on the psoas (at best, it is not doing so much good for the body, at worst, students can damage the psoas by over stretching it).

When you learn to locate and feel your psoas, and you understand how to align this important muscle, you can start to work with it rather than against it. The psoas muscle can be felt from the outside of your body, and students are often surprised and thrilled to be able to feel their psoas with their fingers. The feeling the body experiences when the psoas is touched feels very different than any other muscle in your body. The psoas is often filled with tension and stress, and even though this is an incredibly strong muscle, it often feels very delicate and vulnerable, and has a strong physical reaction to the touch.

The psoas muscle can be felt from the inside as well. It requires a bit of exploration and practice, but in yoga, simply lying on the mat and bringing your attention to the psoas will eventually bring awareness in a sensory way. As you develop this awareness, and you learn to feel the psoas when it releases and tightens, it will become easier to feel when you are off the yoga mat as well. This is especially easy to feel in stress-inducing situations where it will tighten, like being in traffic or in difficult work situations. You can also feel it in relaxed situations, where you can sense the psoas releasing.

Sensory exploration of your psoas combined with the practice of yoga asana will increase your ability to feel the muscle and work with it in a positive way, through learning to relax and improving your

“When you learn to locate and feel your psoas, and you understand how to align this important muscle, you can start to work with it rather than against it.”

posture. When you are well aligned, many yoga stretches can help to stretch out this habitual tension. But other causes of a cramped psoas, such as tension and trauma, need to be released by the psoas itself.

Massage, stretching, manipulating

The psoas is a powerful muscle, and much of the tension in the psoas is not merely a case of habitual and movement pattern stiffness. Although it is true that the amount of time spent in hip flexion positions has a profound impact on the tone of the psoas, deeply rooted tension is more likely the result of unreleased tension and trauma from the past that is lingering in the body. This is why massaging the psoas muscle directly can be extremely painful and may not help in resolving this more deeply stored tension. Some people even get nauseous or dizzy when their psoas is being touched. Tension and trauma from the past are best released by the body itself, in its own time, rather than being stretched or massaged out of the body. And when this release of tension in the psoas happens, it can stimulate a spontaneous release of tension elsewhere in the body as well.

Nervous system

Simply put, the autonomic nervous system, or ANS, is the control system of our bodies that acts largely unconsciously and beyond our direct control. A well functioning ANS is vital to our health and supports growth and rest. The ANS also regulates the body's response to safety and danger. The ANS has two states: the parasympathetic state of relaxation (rest and digest) and the sympathetic state of activation and defence (fight or flight).

Although it is part of a healthy and well functioning body to spend time in both states and be able to shift effortlessly between the two, the body feels at home in the parasympathetic state of relaxation. In this state most energy in the body will flow to the digestive organs and the muscles will be naturally toned and relaxed.

Whenever your body senses or experiences danger, your body responds by going into a heightened state of activation. The first muscular responder when you go into the sympathetic state is your psoas. The psoas contracts in reaction to danger in preparation to either flee or fight. When the danger passes and you feel safe again, if you can release the tension, you will go back into the parasympathetic state of relaxation and rest. Because your body is not made to be in the sympathetic state for a long time, 'coming down' from this increased activation state is important for your physical, emotional and mental health. This is where the power of the mind comes into play and can mess up the natural processes in your body. When you are unable to process and release the stress you experienced through your body, the tension in your psoas will remain in an activated state, even if you think you have calmed down and you are relaxed! Your body is filled up with tension and your head thinks everything is ok. This disconnection between the head and body can last for many years. Some bodies can and will accommodate a lot of tension and trauma while others cannot. You can see your psoas as a container; some people have a big container and others a smaller one. This container, if not emptied out regularly, fills up with unreleased stress, and can store up unresolved tension that stems from decades ago, going back even into your early childhood.

The good news is your body is fully equipped to release the tension in your psoas. It is a completely natural function in your body to let go. And so whenever you experience danger and the moment of heightened stress has passed, your psoas should, and can, naturally release and let go of the tension it is holding on its own.

ecoYoga
mats

- ◆ Made in The UK since 2003
- ◆ plant-based materials
- ◆ 100% natural rubber & jute
- ◆ environmentally sound
- ◆ degradable
- ◆ Excellent Grip - Non-Slip
- ◆ Beautiful

unique



www.ecoyoga.co.uk



RELEASING THE PSOAS



The body's natural processing and release of tension and stress in the psoas.

By Sandra Carson

The key to allowing your psoas to release the built up tension is creating a safe space and an attitude of allowance of release for your body. Sometimes the muscles in your body will spontaneously release when you feel at ease and there is muscle activation or stretch (for example in a yoga class). One way the muscles release is by trembling and vibrating and literally shaking off the stress that was stored. This is a natural and healthy way of tension release in the psoas.

This physical release of tension and/or trauma will then be able to be processed by the brain as well. This processing may cause emotions and memories to come up as fragments, and you may or may not remember the event that caused the stress. It can feel a bit strange to have emotions come up like sadness, anger or even joy, without knowing what caused them. And sometimes, you can directly relate it back to an event or situation.

A student from my class who was shaking and trembling, with tears running down her face, slowly came up to sitting. After being silent for a moment, she shared what happened to her. In the moment she shared, she experienced a strong headache. She explained that she had a flashback of being 11-years-old. It was her sister's birthday; she heard the music and the cheering of people. She remembered that she had been in a bicycle accident that day; she had been hit by

a car and suffered a concussion. But it was her sister's birthday, and there was no attention or room for her pain. And so she swallowed it and suppressed her pain. All these memories came back to her that day as her psoas released, like it happened just yesterday. My student was 52-years-old.

Spiritual psoas

Because the psoas muscle is so closely involved in the physical response of the sympathetic state and stores up our unprocessed tension and trauma, the tone of psoas has an effect on the opening of the 'spiritual heart'. Feeling your own expansive nature, experiencing the unbounded freedom of your heart and the flow of life's energy moving through you, is one of the great promises and rewards of a spiritual practice. The experience of connectivity to all life and 'oneness' will far likely be the fullest when all your defence mechanisms are turned off, when your guard is down and you feel completely 'at peace'. Just try opening your heart in a situation where your body is in fight or flight mode! Only when you feel completely safe can you be vulnerable and can the heart truly open.

Take it easy

The more you learn to access this natural processing of releasing the psoas, the more tension you let go of in your body. This release

changes the tone in the muscles in your body, which can temporarily affect your feeling of stability and steadiness. The stored-up tension in your psoas forces the rest of your body to adapt and accommodate around this tension, creating a distorted sense of balance.

When you start to release, take it slowly. Releasing too much tension in one time can result in a wobbly feeling in your body, deep feeling of fatigue or energy depletion that had been suppressed and is now set free. And stronger emotions may come to the surface afterwards because the door has been opened to release. You may also have access to more memories, of events or people. It is important to release slowly and gently over time, and accept whatever rises up. You may experience the release differently every time it happens. Even expectations you may have around what the release looks like or how intense it is, could inhibit the natural process of letting go. Releasing the psoas teaches you to surrender to your body and let the psoas do what it instinctually knows how to do. Rather than interfere with your body or make it “do” something, just enjoy not being fully in control for a change!

Opening and feeling

You may wonder what it will bring you by releasing your psoas? Your body moves in a way that may feel silly or even weird, and certain unpleasant emotions and feelings may come up from your past. Why not just leave the past alone, live in the moment, accepting what is? In my experience working with people to help them release their psoas, they not only feel better in their body but also in their life on many other levels. When you learn to connect to your psoas and release the stored up tension, it is highly likely that you may sleep better, have better moods, more easily notice your natural boundaries, and be more able to avoid burn out or exhaustion in the long run.

You may be more in touch with your energy, feel more at ease, and more at home in your body and in your life. By feeling more anchored and connected to your body you might be much more able to open your heart and embrace life as it comes. You will experience more peace and stillness in your mind and a sense of aliveness while being relaxed. An awakened and relaxed psoas has nothing less than a magical effect on your being, embodiment and energy.

“Because the psoas muscle is so closely involved in the physical response of the sympathetic state and stores up our unprocessed tension and trauma, the tone of psoas has an effect on the opening of the ‘spiritual heart.’”



PSOAS

AWARENESS YOGA PRACTICE

7 yoga postures to help soothe your psoas



1. Anjaneyasana - Low Lunge



2. Prasarita Padottasana - Wide-Legged Forward Bend



3. Ustrasana Variation - Camel Variation



4. Pavanamuktasana Variation - Extended Leg Lift And Circles



5. Supta Baddha Konasana -
Butterfly Position

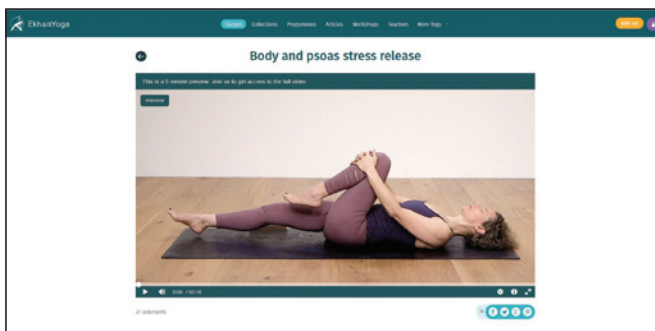


6. Setu Bandha Sarvangasana -
Bridge Pose



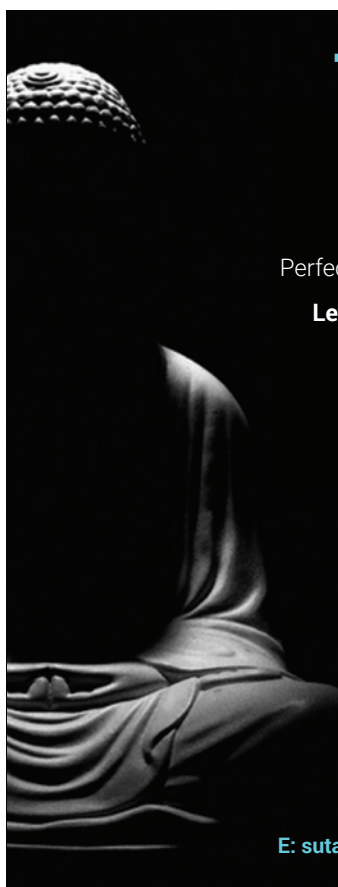
7. Constructive Rest Position

Find out more about
Sandra Carson at:
(livingalignmentyoga.com)



Body and Psoas Stress Release

There is a class on ekhartyoga.com to accompany this practice.
Visit: ekhartyoga.com/classes/body-and-psoas-stress-release



The Darkness Experience

At beautiful retreat centres in Southwest England

A time to slow down, rest inside and be at peace with your self.
Theres No Light, Less Stuff and Zero Stress.
Perfect for DEEP meditation - Enter the wonder of Inner Space - Discover Illumination Within

**Let go into profound relaxation knowing you are completely safe and taken care of.
Enjoy total rest for your tired body and healing for the stressed out mind.
Discover hidden treasures and receive the gifts of your essential nature.**

November	23-25	Darkness Experience
January	25-27	Darkness Experience
February	13-17	Tantra in the Dark
March	8-10	Darkness Experience
	13-17	Darkness Process

“Wow! The Darkness Experience was GREAT!! It is an amazingly powerful retreat and I would certainly recommend it to others.”

“It was a time out of time: just peace, presence, a time for slowing down, with a feeling of being free in myself. It was like feeling back home, in my body. I had the feeling I’ve been touching my soul.”

www.thedarknessexperience.com

E: suta@thedarknessexperience.com T: 07446 052313 FB: [TheDarknessExperience](https://www.facebook.com/TheDarknessExperience)



Suta Guy Rawson

Darkness Guide
Breathworker
Tantra teacher