

## Joel's Stolen Moment Stretching and Muscle Balancing

Painful neck & shoulders, painful low back? If so, your posture may be a bit out of whack.

You don't have to have a big block of time to stretch and balance your body if you catch some stolen moments throughout your day & week:

- Passing through a doorway? Grab a quick chest stretch.
- Standing in line at the ATM? Get a quick quad stretch
- Working in the kitchen? Do some of the "Who, me?" moves, and some glute squeezes/leg kickbacks

The key is consistency, getting a little in each day, throughout the day. If you wait till you have time to do it, you won't do it, or you won't really make a difference. You can't make up for a full week of not doing it with a quick stretch on the weekend.

The position you stay in most of the time becomes 'normal' for your body and your body will adjust to make it easy for you to stay in that position. This can be both a good thing and a bad thing.

### What's Going Wrong: A Look At Posture

We start off in the womb in the fetal position. Everything on the front side of our bodies is short, as we're curled up into a ball.

As we start to walk, we develop an open, upright posture. When we have a nice neutral upright posture our bodies can work to their best advantage.

As we go through life, gravity, sitting, working at a desk, driving, bicycling, washing dishes, cooking, cleaning, etc., all conspire to pull us back to the fetal position: The muscles and connective tissue on the front of our bodies get short & tight, the muscles and connective tissue on the back of our bodies can become long and weak, and the muscles on the sides of our hips become weak, leading to...

### The 3 Most Common Posture Problems:

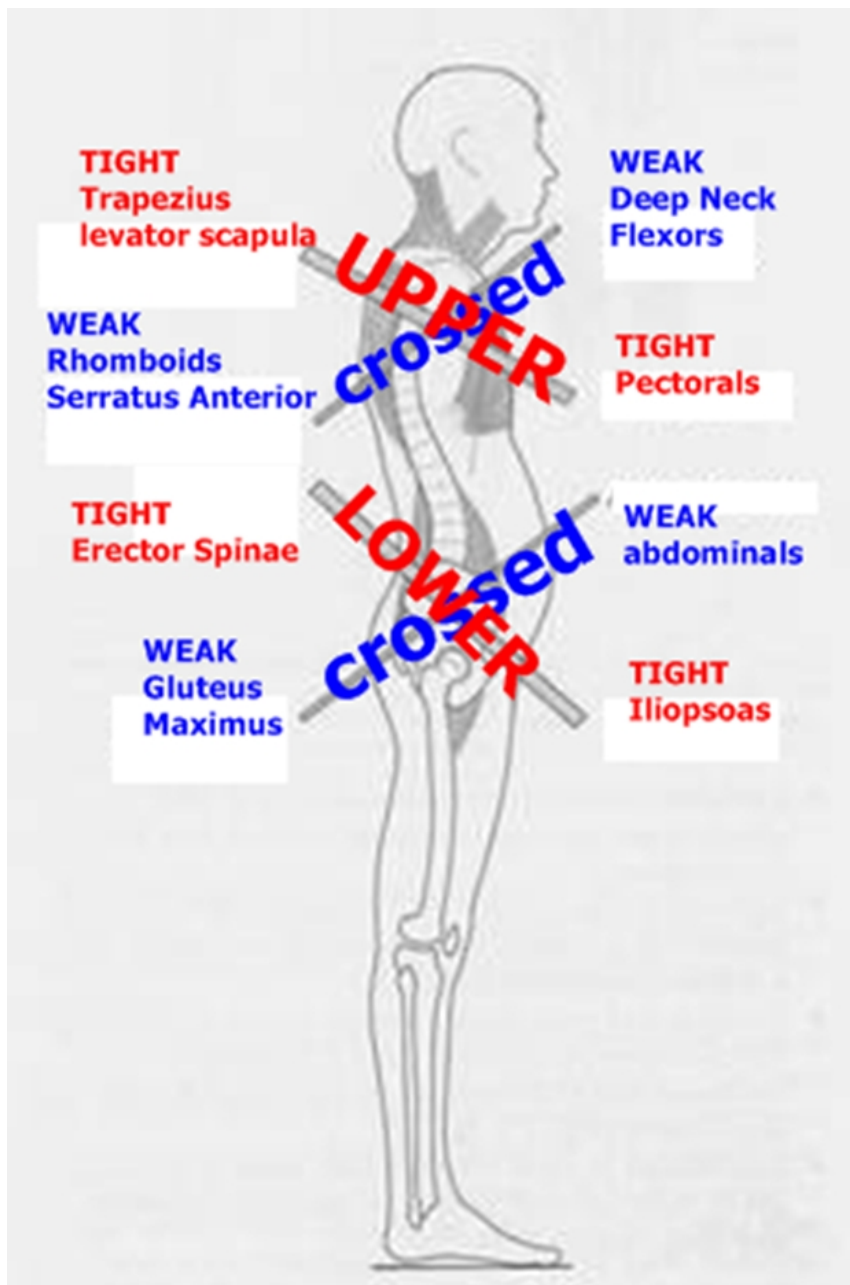
- 1) Upper-Crossed Syndrome
- 2) Lower-Crossed Syndrome
- 3) Hip Crankiness

## 1) Upper-Crossed Syndrome:

**What it looks like:** Head forward, shoulders rounded, upper back rounded.

**What it feels like:** Can cause neck pain, headaches, and possible shoulder injuries. Closes down the chest reducing breathing efficiency and loss of energy.

**What it's caused by:** Short, tight chest muscles, long, weak upper and mid back muscles, long weak front of the neck muscles, short, tight back of the neck muscles.



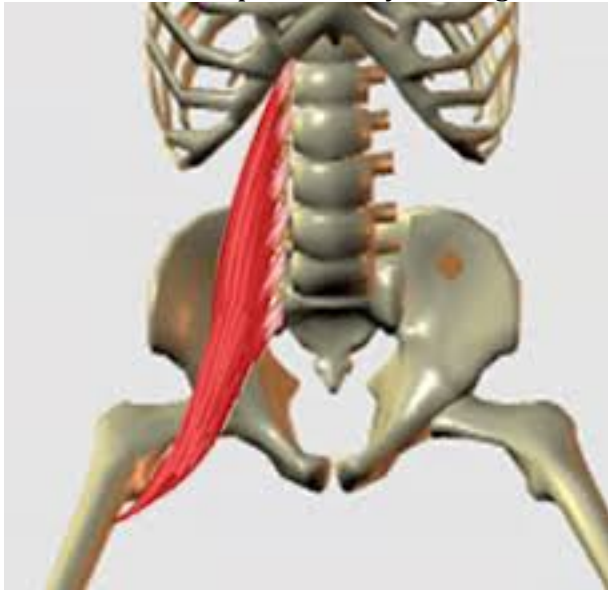
## 2) Lower Crossed Syndrome:

**What it looks like:** Pelvis tilted forward (leading with the belly), big lumbar curve in the low back.

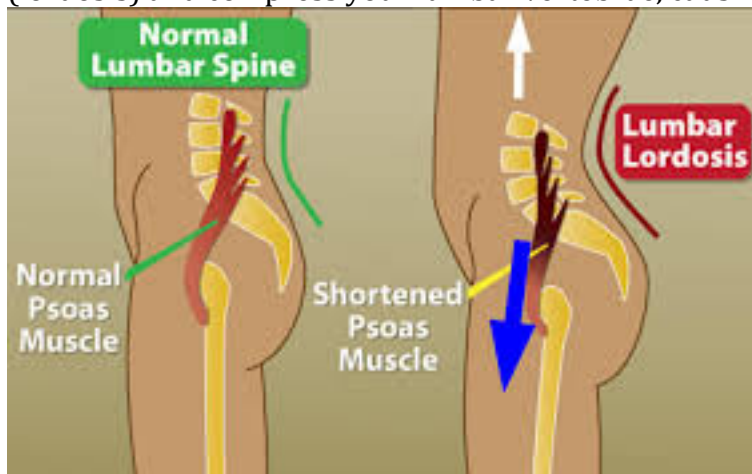
**What it feels like:** Low back pain, hamstrings can feel tight, can set you up for upper-crossed syndrome, and the issues that brings.

**What it's caused by:** Weak gluteus maximus (sitting on the butt too much can cause it to shut off), weak abs, tight low back, short and tight deep hip flexor muscle (Psoas, pronounced 'so-as')

The psoas attaches along the lumbar spine, runs through the back of your abdomen, and attaches at the top inside of your thigh:



Because of where it attaches, when the psoas is short it can pull your low back forward (lordosis) and compress your lumbar vertebrae, causing low back pain.



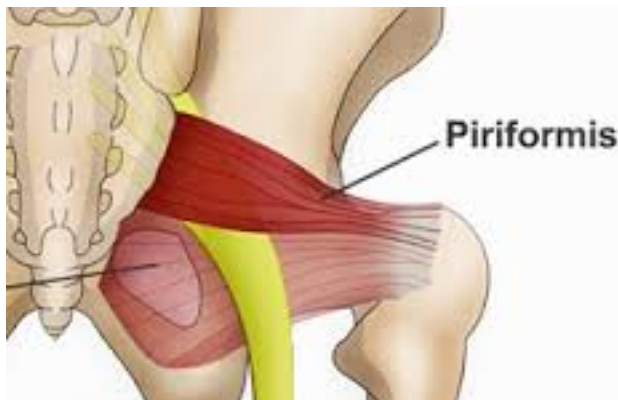
### 3) Hip Crankiness

**What it looks like:** Not typically visible, but often accompanies the first two items above. When sitting, perhaps one's knees want to spread, when lying down one's feet may fall to the sides.

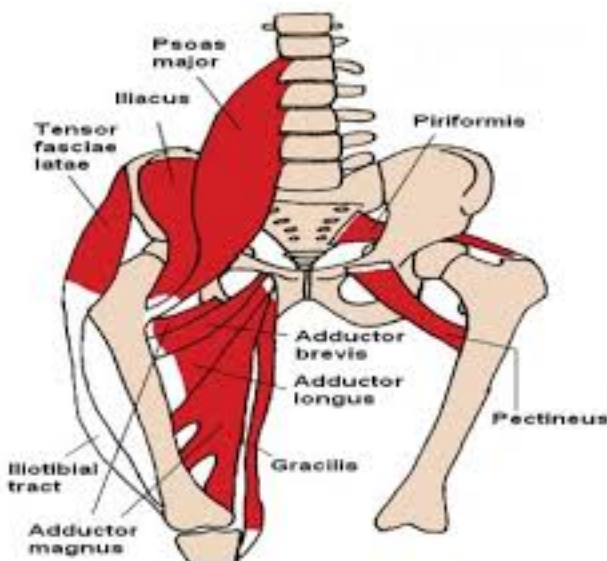
**What it feels like:** Can cause low back pain and tightness, pain or ache deep in the butt, hips feel tight, inner thighs feel tight. Can cause knee issues.

**What it's caused by:** Weak gluteus maximus may have body compensate by over-using deep hip rotator muscles (piriformis) and inner thigh (Adductor) muscles. Weak outside hips due to lack of side-to-side movement.

The piriformis attaches on the front (internal) side of your sacrum, the bone at the very bottom of your spinal column, that makes up the back of your pelvis. Unequal tension across the sacrum from a tight piriformis can torque your SI joints, causing low back pain. Also, the sciatic nerve (seen in yellow, below) can get squished by a tight piriformis, causing sciatica-like pain deep to the butt and possibly down the leg,



<- View from the back



<-View from the front

## What you can do about all of it: Stretching Techniques using Muscle Energy

### What is Muscle Energy Technique (MET)?

Muscle Energy Technique works by using the contraction of one muscle group to decrease tone (tightness or activation) in the opposing muscle group.

#### Lower Body

- **Hip Bridges or Glute Squeeze/kickback** to shut down hip flexors. Then:
  - **Standing Quad Stretch** (engage glute to get muscle energy benefit)
  - **Kneeling Psoas:** tuck pelvis under, glide hips forward (engage glute)
- **Hip Rotator (Piriformis) Stretch:** Lie on your back, bring one knee towards the opposite shoulder. Use your
  - **Seated in Chair Piriformis Stretch.** Cross one leg over the other with your ankle resting on the knee of the opposite leg. Gently press down on the inside of the knee and slowly lean forward.
- **Outer hip (ABductor) activation** by raising your opposite foot away, then:
  - **Inner Thigh (ADductor) Stretch using the Side Lunge**

#### Upper Body

- **“Who, me?” shoulder retractions**  
Standing, with pelvis tucked, squeeze shoulder blades together, pull shoulders down, and rotate palms out. Repeat.
- **Stoplight neck press backs:**  
Tuck your chin and press your head back into the headrest. Repeat.
- **Doorway chest stretch:** Arm up on doorframe. Retract your shoulder blade back towards your spine as you rotate your chest through. It's not a big movement. Your chest is going forward as your shoulder blade is going backwards.
- **Chest opener with the Better Back Burrito™:**  
Fold up a hand towel to make a burrito, lie on top of it with it in the middle of your back (at the point of greatest curvature), breathe. May do 'snow angels' to get muscle energy benefit.
- **Lying down rotational chest opener:**  
Lie on your back, bend your legs 90/90 degrees, so your knees are bent, and your hips are bent, rotate to the left so that your left leg is on the ground. Breathe. Repeat other side.