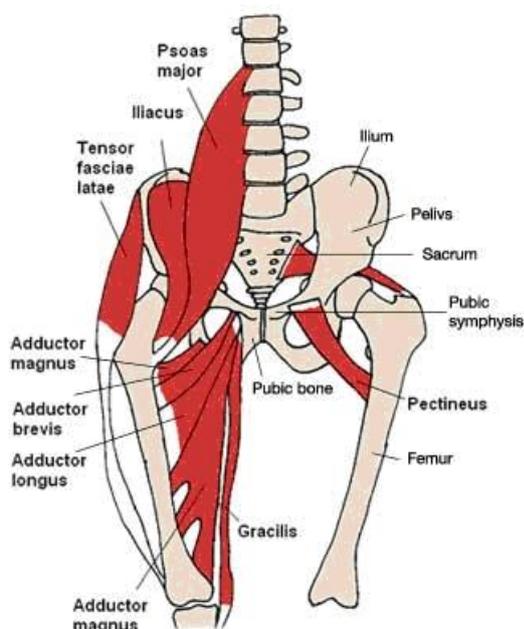




The Importance of Hip Flexor Length on Running Performance and Reduction of Injuries in Football

I spend several weekends assessing the running **function and essential mobility** of young footballers in preparation of training them in football specific speed. One vital aspect that is continually absent in these players, of elite and otherwise standard, is mobility in their hips.



The muscle group of focus in this article is the Hip flexors (Iliacus and Psoas Major). If the Hip Flexors are shortened, then the hips are pulled into flexion. If the hips are in a constantly flexed position, the Primary Hip Extensors (Gluteals) are unable to achieve a full and forceful contraction.

Knowing that the gluteals directly impact horizontal propulsion, maximum speed, the capacity to decelerate and jump, and prevent hamstrings from taking excessive loads and risking injury, then **tight hip flexors will decrease performance in all of these areas.**

Add to this the knowledge that tight hip flexors decrease the athlete's capacity to take advantage of the sling-shot action of the Hip Flexors in the recovery phase of the swing thigh and you have **performance impediments** in both anterior and posterior kinetic chains.

See our Examples of Hip Flexor Stretches and Torso Stability Exercises at the bottom of this article.

If a player complains about chronically tight Hip Flexors even though they routinely stretch, then attention needs to be diverted to the core. Since the Hip Flexors originate on the Lumbar Vertebrae, they play an important role in lumbar spine stabilisation. An inability to stabilise the low back during play and training due to weak core musculature will cause the Hip Flexors to step up and hold an isometric contraction to stabilise the lumbar spine.

For explosive acceleration, players need to be able to maintain a strong and stable torso with the pelvic girdle locked in neutral and generate powerful hip extension with the gluteals. Core training for footballers should include Flexion Stabilisation Training as well as Rotational Stability Exercises.

Make sure that players have a weekly Stretch and Stability routine so that they can maximise their athletic potential and decrease their risk of on field injury.

For more information go to: www.academyofsportspeed.com

Stretch Exercises:

Figure 1: Short Adductor to Long Adductor

– Keep foot of outstretched leg firmly planted, press little toe into ground and deliberately open through hips.

Figure 2: Long Lunge with Elbow to Ankle

– Press rear heel away in a long lunge position as you melt your hips to the ground.

Figure 3: 4 Stage Hip Flexor – Keep front foot firmly planted and continually press hip forward as you increase the length of the fascial line.

Torso Stability Exercises:

Figure 4: Prone Hover Stage 1 & 2

– Lie flat on the floor on your tummy and pull your elbows directly under your shoulders. Lift up til your body is a straight strong line between shoulders and ankles. Draw your belly button up into your spine and hold for 30 to 90 seconds or until you reach fatigue. Repeat 3 times with a 30 – 60 second break between each . For Stage II extend one foot out pushing back through your heel, hold each foot up and out for half of the total exercise time.

Figure 5: Prone Plank Stage 1

– Lie flat on the floor on your tummy and pull your hands directly under your shoulders. Lift up til your body is a straight strong line between shoulders and ankles. (Push up position) Now draw your shoulders forward til they are on top of your finger tips. Hold for 30 to 90 seconds or until you reach fatigue. Repeat 3 times with a 30 – 60 second break between each .



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5