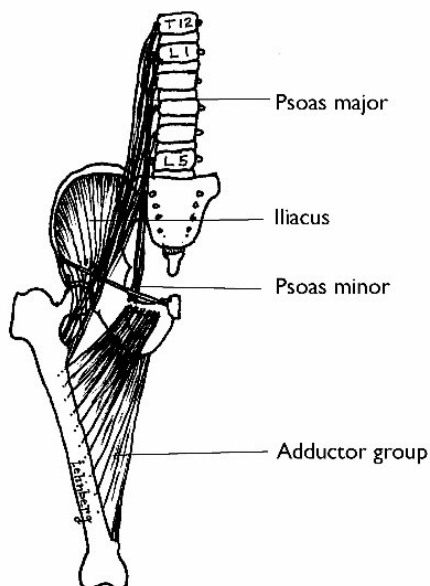


The Kwa: Folding, Sinking, Rising, and Turning

The **kwa** is the area where the leg joins the trunk. It includes the hip joint, pelvis, sacrum, inguinal crease, inguinal lymph nodes, nerves and blood vessels, iliopsoas, adductors of the thigh, lower parts of the small and large intestines, pelvic diaphragm, rectum, and anus. It may also be considered as the area of the body between the knee and the waist/ midriff, including the entire lumbar area. We have a left kwa and a right kwa.

Deep Muscles of the Kwa



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Some people expand the area of the kwa to include everything between the knee and the waist (midriff), up to and including the lumbar.

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Folding and unfolding the kwa while sitting

Sit on the front edge of a chair or stool with an unpadded, horizontal seat. Feet hip width apart and parallel to each other. Spine in neutral alignment with its 4 curves, and vertical to gravity. Maintain a neutral alignment through this entire activity. Allow the midriff to be open; do not compress abdominal organs. Feel sitz bones on the seat.

- **To fold forward and sink**, hinge at the kwa, roll the sit bones back on the chair as torso tilts forward. Release the weight of the torso into gravity as you tilt forward. You may feel pressure gradually increase on the soles of your feet. You may allow the weight of your pelvic, abdominal,

and thoracic organs rest on the inner surface of your front body wall. Go forward only as far as is comfortable without muscular effort or strain. Keep the spine in neutral alignment.

- **To unfold and rise**, with the spine in neutral alignment, use the pressure on the soles of the feet as support to rise. Initiate the movement to come upright by unfolding the kwa. Alternately, bring your attention to your coccyx. “Thread” your coccyx through the hip joints, knee joints, ankle joints and to the soles of the feet. Come up by gently pressing the tip of the coccyx forward to bring the spine up. While doing so, keep the coccyx connected through the leg joints and into the soles. Feel legs light and connected to the coccyx. Use minimal muscular effort in the legs to bring the torso vertical. Keep the spine aligned, space in the midriff, and breathing relaxed. Return to vertical as the tail remains connected to the soles of the feet through both legs.

Folding and unfolding the kwa while standing

For this foundational exercise, we will practice folding the kwa while maintaining an aligned spine with 4 curves. Bowing (flexing) the spine while folding the kwa comes later. Folding the kwa and flexing the spine is a precursor to the Asian Squat.

- **Folding the kwa:** Stand with feet shoulder width apart, parallel to each other, spine in neutral alignment with 4 curves. Find the crease in the front of each hip. To fold, deepen the crease into the body and fold the kwa. The tail bone shifts back as though gently reaching back to “sit on a chair that is not there.” The torso tilts forward. The body’s weight will shift to the heels, and you may need to reach your arms forward to maintain balance. The knees will bend in response to the folding kwa. They do not shift forward or if so, only slightly and not beyond the forefoot. Maintain an aligned spine, space in the midriff, and easeful breath.
- **Unfolding the kwa:** From the folded kwa position above, unfold the kwa to bring the torso back upright. As the kwa unfolds, it comes forward in space; the pelvis comes under the torso while it comes upright. To support unfolding the kwa, gently shift the weight to the ball of the foot, *bubbling spring* in energy terms. Maintain an aligned spine as the torso returns upright and you return to standing.
Alternately, come upright by initiating the movement with the coccyx. “Thread” the tip of the coccyx through the leg joints: the hip, knee, ankle and into the sole of the foot. Threading this connection grounds the spine, roots the coccyx, and the legs. As the coccyx gently presses forward, there is a sense of connecting the base of the spine through the legs, and into the earth. The pelvis comes under, and the torso comes upright while maintaining alignment. Return to standing.

Shifting Side-to-Side, Weight Transfer Through the Kwa

Stand with feet parallel, shoulder width or slightly wider. Drop your tail, relax your lumbar, and fold a bit in the kwa. Find and maintain weight and contact with the earth through the centerline of each foot, from *bubbling spring* to heel. To shift weight to the left, draw energy up through the sole of the left foot and press down through the right foot. The left kwa folds, the right kwa unfolds. Pour from right to left; the entire right side of the body will empty, and the left side of the body will fill. Though not weight

bearing on the right side, maintain connection to the earth through the sole of the right foot. Reverse this movement to shift weight to the right side.

Alternately, you may shift weight by initiating with the tail. To shift weight to the left, draw the coccyx toward the left foot and away from the right foot. You may notice the left pelvic floor condensing/knitting and the right pelvic floor expanding. The entire spine maintains neutral alignment and follows the coccyx. The pelvis remains neutral and horizontal with the earth; it tilts little, if at all, in any direction.

When shifting weight side-to-side, the spine stays in alignment and does not rotate. This alignment is seen when the nose, sternum, navel, and pubis remain in a line. The back of the head and back of the sacrum remain aligned. The shoulder girdle and pelvis remain aligned to each other. The head remains level and does not rise and fall through the movement.

Turning the Trunk Through the Kwa

“The millstone turns while the axle does not turn.” ~Tai chi maxim.

Stand with feet parallel, shoulder width or slightly wider. Drop your tail, relax your lumbar, and fold a bit in the kwa. Find and maintain weight and contact with the earth through the center of each foot, from *bubbling spring* to heel. Maintain the centerline of the trunk as you turn the body. To rotate to the right, fold the right kwa in the front and open it in the back. Alternately, you can initiate by spiraling inwardly through the sole of the right foot and up the leg as it takes weight and the right kwa folds.

Movement may be initiated from the sole of the feet. Shift your weight 100% from leg to leg and fold into the kwa of the weight bearing leg and unfold the kwa of the non-weight bearing leg. Each knee maintains its alignment with its respective foot; they do not cave in or bow out. The trunk maintains its integrity as the nose, sternum, navel, and pubis remain in a line. The shoulder girdle and pelvis maintain alignment with each other. Another way to put this is that the frame of the torso is maintained; the shoulder nests keep their relationship with the kwa. The shoulder nest is the soft pit just below the lateral clavicle.

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