

NEWS LESSON

Do Your Hips Really Hold Stress?

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Why do you think ideas like "your hips hold tension" spread so easily?
2. Do you ever notice your body tensing when you are under pressure? How do you cope?
3. How much do you trust advice that comes from teachers or influencers rather than doctors?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**slogan**	☐	A	to push something gently
2	**release**	☐	B	to do with how something physically works or is built
3	**mechanical**	☐	C	a small, unusual feature
4	**crucially**	☐	D	to let something out or set it free
5	**quirk**	☐	E	exercise that makes your heart and breathing work harder
6	**nudge**	☐	F	a short, catchy phrase that people repeat
7	**aerobic**	☐	G	a doctor or nurse who treats patients
8	**clinician**	☐	H	in a way that is very important

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Yoga teachers and social media say the hips store tension and trauma. Experts say stress can tighten muscles and sharpen pain, but there is no good evidence that the hips are special.

1 In yoga classes, on TikTok and across the wellness world, the saying is everywhere: your hips hold tension. The hips, it suggests, are an emotional storage unit for old stress and painful memories, and stretching them is supposed to release what is stored there. When The Guardian put the idea to experts on 11 October 2026, the answer was more careful than the slogan.

2 Muscle tension, the experts explain, usually has one of two causes. The first is mechanical: some muscles resist being stretched even when they are fully relaxed, which reflects how tissues are built and used. The second is that muscles and nerves stay slightly active more often than necessary, and this does often happen under psychological stress. Neither cause maps neatly onto what people actually feel, and "tight hips" can mean pain, an unwanted pulling or simple stiffness, sometimes coming from the buttocks or back.

3 Crucially, there is no sign that the hips are especially prone to stress-related tightness. Evidence linking mental strain with muscle tension is strongest for the shoulders, jaw and pelvic floor. People who have experienced trauma, particularly in childhood, are more likely to have chronic pain and are more sensitive to pain in laboratory tests, but again nothing suggests that this applies more to the hips. Physiotherapist Greg Lehman puts it plainly: there is nothing special about the hip.

4 Other explanations are more down to earth. Dr Abby Cheng, who treats hip disorders at Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, notes that people with very shallow or very deep hip sockets tend to have more pain, and that irritated tendons on the outside of the hip are common in middle-aged and older women. Sitting may shorten some hip muscles, but studies have not conclusively tied short muscles to pain. A structural quirk can nudge up the chance of pain, while stress, poor sleep, inactivity and anxiety often tip the balance.

5 The advice is practical. Start by moving more: if walking, gentle stretching and exercise ease the tightness, it is probably muscular and harmless. Avoid stretching too aggressively, since going beyond a gentle range can hurt more than it helps. Aim for regular aerobic exercise and strength training at least twice a week; strength training may help the hips cope with use and, in older adults, increases bone density. Wider health matters too, including time with friends, because it can reduce sensitivity to pain.

6 None of this means persistent pain should be ignored. Get help if tightness does not improve with movement or worsens the more you move, and look for a clinician who examines your whole body and asks about your stress and sleep. The bottom line is that stress can influence how muscles and pain feel, but the hips are not a special vault for it. And if some discomfort lingers, learning to make peace with it can, ironically, help.

Sources: The Guardian, Do we really 'hold tension' in our hips?; Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Is there a relationship between psychological stress or anxiety and chronic nonspecific neck-arm pain in adults? A systematic review and meta-analysis. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The experts say stress has no effect at all on muscles. T F NG
2. Irritated tendons outside the hip are described as common in middle-aged and older women. T F NG
3. The text says that sitting definitely causes pain by shortening muscles. T F NG
4. The text says which stretches are best for the hips. T F NG
5. The evidence linking mental strain with tension is stronger for the shoulders, jaw and pelvic floor than for the hips. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

aggressively	diet	lingers	persistent	psychological	relaxed	scan	vault

1. Some muscles resist being stretched even when they are fully _____ .
2. Avoid stretching too _____ , since going beyond a gentle range can hurt more than it helps.
3. The hips are not a special _____ for stress.
4. Despite months of treatment, the _____ pain in his knee did not go away.
5. Her counsellor focuses on the _____ side of pain, such as fear and worry.
6. A cough sometimes _____ for weeks after a cold.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Before she joined the class, she _____ yoga. (NEVER TRY)
2. In many classes, the hips _____ as a place where stress is stored. (DESCRIBE)
3. If I _____ about strength training earlier, I would have started sooner. (KNOW)
4. Over the past decade, many studies _____ the link between stress and pain. (EXAMINE)
5. She _____ much better after she changed her routine. (FEEL)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many collocations are a verb plus a noun. Say the whole phrase in your head and choose the verb that a native speaker would use.

draw	ease	keep	run	shed	strike	toll

1. Years of worry about money can take a heavy _____ on anyone's mood.
2. New studies may _____ light on why some people feel pain more strongly than others.
3. People who stretch too hard _____ the risk of hurting themselves.
4. It helps to _____ an open mind when a yoga teacher makes a claim about the body.
5. Walking or gentle stretching may _____ the tightness.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Why might an idea feel true to people even when the evidence does not support it?
2. Do you think accepting a small amount of pain is a good approach, or is it risky, in your view?
3. How can you tell the difference between pain you can manage yourself and pain you should have checked?

9 Role-play: a hip-opening class

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the yoga fan

Your yoga teacher says your hips hold stress. You want to book a hip-opening class. Explain why you believe it, and try to persuade your friend to come with you.

Student B · the sceptical friend

You've read that there's no good evidence for this idea. Ask your friend two questions about it, and suggest another way to feel better. You can agree, disagree or find a compromise.

Useful phrases

I've heard that your hips hold stress.
That's what my yoga teacher told me.
I'm not sure there's any proof.
Why don't we try a gentle walk first?
If it doesn't get better, we'll see a doctor.
Let's try it and see how we feel.

Afterwards, tell the class: what did you decide, and why?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 D · 3 B · 4 H · 5 C · 6 A · 7 E · 8 G

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 relaxed · 2 aggressively · 3 vault · 4 persistent · 5 psychological · 6 lingers

6 Verb forms

1 had never tried · 2 are described · 3 had known · 4 have examined · 5 felt

7 Language focus

1 toll · 2 shed · 3 run · 4 keep · 5 ease

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