

The Importance of Proper Posture

Correct Alignment Leads to Better Health

Hope Bentley

Talk of good posture often generates images of women walking in a circle with books balanced on their heads or soldiers standing at attention. But good posture does not have to be rigid or ridiculous. In fact, far from ridiculous, it may be the key to good health.

According to Patrick Wroblewski, a Boulder, Colorado-based structural integration practitioner, "Good posture is a dynamic, working awareness of how gravity is coming down through the body." In other words, just as the body moves and changes throughout the day, so should posture.

Wroblewski explains that many people come in to his practice with complaints

misalignment, like standing with a hip cocked to one side. These common forms of less-than-perfect posture mean less-than-healthy consequences for the body.

Does Posture Matter?

Ever feel low on energy? Get sick often? Experience headaches or digestive upset, like constipation or diarrhea? Feel less agile than you used to be? Your postural habits may be behind these symptoms.

Proper posture means the body is aligned so that all the muscles work as they were designed to. On the other hand, poor posture leads to inefficient

Embrace and love your body. It's the most amazing thing you will ever own!



Working in front of a computer often leads to poor posture. Learn how to counteract the effects.

of lower back pain, and stiff necks and shoulders, most of which have a direct correlation to poor posture. If a person sits hunched in front of a computer screen all day, it's likely the head hovers towards the screen, the lower back has collapsed and the tail bone is supporting the weight, and legs are crossed or splayed. Bad standing posture includes the same hunching or lateral

movement, causing the muscles to have to do extra work. For instance, if the head isn't resting correctly on top of the neck and spine but hovers over the chest instead, the muscles at the back of the neck have to remain contracted to hold the head up. The results? Circulation becomes hindered, and oxygen and

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New office in Flagler coming soon!

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nutrients have a hard time flowing through the body. Contracted muscles are less able to receive hydration and energy, and the tissue eventually becomes hard and fibrous. Eventually, muscles can pull bones out of alignment and cause serious problems and discomfort.

The bottom line is, poor posture can lead to muscular stress and fatigue, which can in turn lead to deficient circulation, compromised immunity, and poor lymph flow--which brings us back to low energy, frequent illness, headaches, digestive issues, and waning agility. So to answer our earlier question, yes, posture matters.

Perfecting Posture

Correcting poor posture requires undoing the hardening, or fibrosis, of the muscles that have been habitually contracted, allowing them to relax and the bones to move back into place. Perhaps a simple concept, but not an easy task.

Wroblewski uses a combination of techniques to help correct posture: Swedish massage can help increase circulation and release chronically held areas. Deep tissue massage helps wake up the body and reverse some of the fibrosis in the tissue. And other bodywork techniques can further precipitate postural adjustments. He says, "Any kind of manipulation--craniosacral, acupressure--can cause an unwinding of tension and allow the body to release to the position in which it belongs."

Wroblewski also recommends movement education, an umbrella term that includes many types of bodywork, such as Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Hellerwork, and Trager Approach. Movement education advocates that one's body structure and movements can get stuck in habitual, unhealthy patterns. Movement education unwinds the patterns and teaches the body, as well as the mind, anew. This is done through a series of sessions where practitioners may use hands-on manipulation to teach the student different, more efficient ways to move, sit, stand, reach, bend, lift and walk. Ultimately, this balances the body and allows energy to move freely.

Movement education techniques may be

especially beneficial for people suffering from chronic difficulties, but also for anyone trying to achieve higher levels of physical and mental wellness.

According to Wroblewski, bodywork can induce a "neutral reprogramming," so that people can start from scratch and learn to recognize when good posture is breaking down. Then the necessary adjustments can be made.

What's a Body To Do?

Desk jobs are notorious for wreaking havoc and causing postural impairments. Sitting for hours on end staring at a computer screen is likely one of the worst things you can do to your body. If you spend a lot of time sitting, make sure both feet are flat on the ground to give yourself a "tripod" of stability for the spine to rest on. Also, be sure to take frequent breaks, even if it just means walking to the window for a

moment, or getting a glass of water. And when standing, distribute weight evenly between both feet, and don't lock the knees or ankles.

Good posture takes practice, practice, practice and constant reminding. Wroblewski suggests leaving reminders in places where you will run into them throughout your day.

Old habits die hard, and this is true for muscular habits too. Be sure to schedule a series of massage treatments to help retrain the body. And talk to your practitioner about stretches and posture tips that can enhance your massage sessions. As you progress, you will notice less joint and muscle pain, fewer headaches, more energy, and possibly even stronger immunity and better digestion. Finally, you will develop a stronger awareness of your body and an increased sense of well being.



Practice makes perfect! Good postural habits require repetition and practice, practice, practice.

Happiness is Contagious

Maybe mom was right. Research suggests that surrounding yourself with friends and family who are happy can actually increase your own happiness.

Scientists at Harvard University and the University of California, San Diego, found that emotions, particularly happiness, have a viral effect in how they spread from one person to another. For every happy person in your physical social network, you have a 9 percent chance of increasing your own happiness. The effect is more pronounced the closer someone is to you geographically, and it does not seem to include electronic communications. The study, "Dynamic Spread of Happiness in a Large Social Network," can be found online in the British Medical Journal (www.bmj.com).

This is especially good news considering the potential health benefits of happiness and positivity. A study published in Stroke magazine has indicated a "significant association"

between optimism and a reduced risk of stroke. This is in addition to studies that have linked optimism to a healthier immune system, faster wound healing, and a lower risk of heart disease. While the exact cause of the benefits is not clear, one theory is that optimistic people are more likely to take care of their health. In addition, there is hope that teaching optimism could become part of a preventative program for various conditions.

What's one way to get happy? Try massage! Exposure to stress, a contributing factor to unhappiness, over a long period of time can increase the rate of neural degeneration and increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease. Luckily, a study from Umea University in Sweden has shown that just five minutes of massage has the potential to lower stress, and 80 minutes of massage has a tremendously positive effect on stress levels. Get massage, get happy, and cheer up your friends and family!



Surrounding yourself with happy people is healthy!

Hibernating is for the Bears

Plan to Stay Fit This Winter

Winter's here, and you've moved your running shoes to the back of the closet until April. Yet that piece of pumpkin pie has your name on it.

With the onset of colder weather, shorter days, and snow-covered streets, we eat more and exercise less, waiting for the spring thaw to get back in shape. Instead of having to make New Year's resolutions to lose holiday weight and join a health club, why not set goals to stay fit this winter?

MOVE FITNESS INDOORS

Winter is the perfect time to start a weight-training program. When it's sunny and warm in summer, you'd rather be outside cycling or rock climbing. When it's snowing, why not lift weights for 30 minutes during lunch? Statistics show that more people

suffer heart attacks in winter from shoveling snow, often because they're out of shape. With regular strength training, you'll be able to shovel that snow and get a head start with outdoor sports when spring comes around.

WALK OUTSIDE ON WEEKENDS

Going for a jog or walk during mid-day when the sun is high is a great time to get outside and catch a few rays. Be sure to dress warmly, wear sunscreen, and drink plenty of water. Dehydration is most common in colder months when you're less aware of fluid loss.

TAKE A DANCE CLASS

Accept that invitation to the New Year's Eve celebration and take a class in ballroom dancing. While you're dancing, you're not hanging around the buffet table or the bar, and your

waistline will thank you for it.

REDISCOVER ICE SKATING

Whether it's on a frozen pond or at a rink, ice skating provides seasonal exercise opportunities, especially good for the legs. And it's great fun, bringing out the kid in all of us.

CONSIDER SNOWSHOEING

Snowshoeing is just a matter of strapping snowshoes onto your boots and walking. Snowshoes make hiking trails and snowy city parks accessible and can be rented from sporting goods stores at a relatively inexpensive price.

*1000's of
candles can be
lit from just one
and the life of it
won't be
shortened.
Happiness never
decreases from
being shared.
-Buddha*

I am very excited to begin this journey of healing with massage and reiki in our little community. I will have a new office on Main St. in Flagler very soon and I look forward to seeing you there when the doors open for business. In the meantime, I will be seeing clients in my home through the winter months to allow time to finish my office. Visit my website and Facebook or Instagram page for updates.
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