

IS POOR POSTURE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH?

As you read this article, take a second to reflect on your posture:

- Are your shoulders slumped forward?
- Is your neck in line with the rest of your spine?
- Do you carry your head forward?
- When you stand, is one shoulder higher than the other?
- Is one hip higher than the other?
- Does one foot flare out?
- Do your shoes wear unevenly?
- When you try to stand or sit up straight, do you find that position difficult to maintain, and soon slip back into your “normal” posture as soon as you stop actively trying?

If you answered YES to any of the above, you are struggling with bad posture.

How important is posture? Can it actually be linked to other health problems? What steps can you take to correct yours? What can you do for your children to ensure that they will develop good postural habits?

POSTURE PERFECT

Excellent posture is a universal sign of confidence. In every culture good posture is synonymous with attractiveness, beauty and intelligence. In the business world, proper posture conveys power, strength and stamina. If these reasons were not enough to convince you to do something to correct your posture, you should know that poor posture is actually hazardous to your health!

In his book, *The Performance Edge*, Robert Cooper explains exactly how poor posture can affect the body.

“Of the 680 muscles in your body, only a few are specially designed to hold your body upright and relaxed. Most of us tense dozens of muscles,

and sometimes hundreds of the wrong muscles when we sit, stand and move. Over the course of a typical work [or school] day, this results in an enormous waste of personal energy. ... Poor posture distorts the alignment of bones. It chronically tenses muscles and contributes to stressful conditions ...”

Here are some of the most common problems your bad posture could be causing:

- Loss of vital lung capacity, by as much as 30 percent or more
- Reduced blood and oxygen to your brain, causing:
 - Slow reaction time
 - Impaired thinking
 - Loss of emotional control
- Limited range of motion
- Stiffness of joints
- Pain syndromes: headaches, jaw pain and muscular aches
- Upper back and neck tension
- Back pain
- Knee or ankle pain, especially on stairs or during running or walking
- Faulty digestion and/or constipation
- Tendency towards cynicism and pessimism
- Inability to effectively manage stress
- Magnified feelings of panic and helplessness
- Depression

Contrast this to how you could feel with better posture. Again, Cooper explains:

“With optimal posture, there’s no tension or stiffness at all. You may have an exhilarating sense of ease at work, of moving buoyantly, fluidly and comfortably in space. The chest is open and floats upward. The head is up, with the neck long and the chin slightly in. The jaw and tongue are relaxed. Shoulders are broad and loose. The pelvic area and hips are level. The back is comfortably straight, and the abdomen is free of all tension. You are quite frankly resting in motion, with the feeling

of an imaginary sky hook gently lifting your whole spinal column upward from a central point from the top of your head.” (Cooper, The Performing Edge.)

YOUR BRAIN IS (OR IS NOT) IN CONTROL!

What most people—and doctors—don’t realize is that your posture is mostly outside of your voluntary control. Simply telling your kids to “stand up straight” is not going to have long-lasting effects (except to maybe frustrate both you and them). Our brains control our posture in an “automatic pilot” mode. Sure, you may be able to override it for a bit and force yourself to stand up straight, but soon you will find that your autopilot takes over and you assume the same posture you had before. The only way to address posture permanently is to optimize your brain function.

A good example of this is scoliosis (a curvature of the spine). This may be due to a musculoskeletal problem, such as a shorter leg on one side. But commonly we find that scoliosis is related to an imbalance in the part of the brain (the cerebellum) that controls the tone of the intrinsic muscles of the spine. When we address this causative factor, we can often correct the scoliosis without bracing or other more invasive treatments. This is one reason why it is so important to have your children evaluated as soon as possible so that we can detect and treat spinal curvatures and other problems early on.


Furthermore, your posture is actually a window into how well your brain is functioning. As functional neurologists and specialists in human biomechanics, Dr. Sparaco and Dr. Engelbart know that poor or asymmetrical posture can be one of the first signs of neurological dysfunction. We not only see postural changes with severe problems, such as after a stroke or with brain damage, but we also see subtle postural problems related to the common conditions that we treat: depression, anxiety, headaches, scoliosis, vertigo and other balance problems, learning disorders, insomnia, back, neck and disc problems, numbness and tingling, recurring or chronic injuries, Dowager’s Hump (hunchback posturing) and sports injuries.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

The approach we take to improving posture is similar to the approach we take in helping our patients through other health challenges--we properly diagnose the cause of the problem, look at the body and brain holistically, and then customize a treatment program to achieve results.

For improving posture, some of the common things we do include:

- ✦ Optimize the areas of the brain that control postural muscles automatically
- ✦ Improve the brain’s communication with the body, and the body’s communication with the brain
- ✦ Optimize joint and muscle function so that the back, neck and extremities work and move like they were designed to move
- ✦ Improve coordination, balance, stability and core strength
- ✦ Prescribe customized flexible orthotics to correct for pronation, leg length deficiencies, and other problems

Do you know someone who suffers from frequent headaches, neck pain or back pain? Do you suffer from muscles tension, “pinched nerves,” or numbness and tingling? Do you have a family member who cycles through depression and anxiety? Does your child have asthma, learning disorders or attention disorders? If so, you will also most likely observe a postural problem as well. Don’t delay. Call our office at **972-874-3838** or visit our Web site at **www.Alt-HealthSolutions.com** and schedule a complimentary initial consultation with Dr. Engelbart or Dr. Sparaco today. 

The appearance of good posture is relaxed as the ears, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles align in one straight line. If you hung an imaginary plumb line from the earlobe, the line would hang straight through the middle of the anklebone.

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