

Check Your Posture

Written by Valecia Weeks, CMT
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Atten-Hut! Is that what we think of when we hear the phrase, “good posture”? 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.

Many women complain of lower back pain, and stiff necks and shoulders, most of which have a direct correlation to poor posture. If you sit 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. Remember the phrase, “put yo hands on yo hips and let yo backbone slip”. Bad standing posture includes the same hunching or lateral 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. Let me tell you...I know. I'm in physical therapy right because of hovering over a computer too long.

Does Posture Really 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 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 nutrients have a hard time flowing through the

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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 DOES matter!

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. 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.

What's a Body To Do? Desk jobs are notorious for wreaking havoc and causing postural impairments. 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. 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. 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 massage practitioner about stretches and posture tips that can enhance your massage sessions.

For more questions on the benefit of Massage Therapy, contact Valecia at vktw@yahoo.com