10 MYTHS ABOUT POSTURE

Myth #1
Posture is a trivial thing my mother used to pester me about only so that I would look presentable.

Actually, posture is key to optimal health. Just as a building needs a solid foundation and structure to remain strong in wind, rain, and earthquakes, so does your body. Proper alignment of the organs, bones, and muscles improves circulation and breathing, boosts the nervous system, supports organ functions, promotes muscle relaxation and stress reduction, enhances athletic performance, reduces risk of injury, and accelerates healing from injury.

Myth #2
I know what I need to do—I just have to remember to straighten up.

"Just straightening up" is usually accompanied by muscle tension and distortion of the spine. It quickly leads to discomfort and fatigue, causing most of us to return to slouching. When people try to have good posture by "straightening up", they usually do more harm than good. Truly good posture does not take a lot of muscular effort and quickly becomes a comfortable habit.

Myth #3
It's too late to change my posture.

It is never too late to change your posture. Your body is resilient and adaptable. Even tissues as sturdy as your bones actually change during your lifetime, getting thicker and stronger where stress is placed on them and becoming lacy and weak when no stress is placed on them. Even people in their 80's and 90's can making significant changes in their posture, giving them greater mobility and health.

Myth #4
The pelvis should be tucked to protect the back.

Nearly everyone from fitness instructors and dance teachers to medical professionals makes the mistake of recommending a tucked pelvis. This is discordant with our natural structure. When human beings became bipedal, the L5-S1 disc became wedge-shaped. Anteverting (tipping) the pelvis preserves the wedge-shaped space that accommodates this disc perfectly. This natural position protects against L5-S1 disc damage including bulging, herniation, and sequestration. Other structures, from the vertebrae stacked above the pelvis to

the organs within the abdominal and thoracic cavities, depend on a well-positioned, anteverted pelvis as a foundation. The pelvis is the keystone to the rest of our structure and it is crucial to situate it correctly.

Myth #5
Chin up and chest out constitutes good posture.

This military stance is achieved by contracting the muscles in the neck and low back. Not only does this create tension, it exaggerates the cervical and lumbar curves, hindering circulation to these areas and potentially pinching nerve roots.

Myth #6
Good posture takes a lot of mental effort; if I don't pay attention, I will slump into bad posture.

As with any new skill, most people will need to give attention to learning and practicing new movements. But the body wants to heal, and good posture feels good. After an initial learning period, you will have moments of awareness when you realize that you are indeed using new techniques to move and position your body without using conscious thought to do so. As you practice new movements, they will become increasingly natural to your body. Eventually, old habits and poor posture will take more effort than good posture.

Myth #7
Changing my posture is going to take a lot of physical effort.

You do not need to be young, strong, flexible, or physically fit to have good posture. You do need a threshold amount of muscle strength (tone) to support your structure. You also need appropriate relaxation, muscle length, and good alignment. Most people over-emphasize the need for strength and underemphasize the need for relaxation and alignment. While learning correct alignment may require that you tone some muscles, most of the work can be done "on the job." The small amount of extra effort you may have to make will be amply rewarded in how you feel.

Myth #8
Belly breathing is good breathing; chest breathing is bad breathing.

Different kinds of breathing are needed for different kinds of movement. Belly breathing is appropriate when you have an elevated need for oxygen (as when you are running) or breath control (as when you are playing the saxophone). Otherwise, when at rest, your inhalations should primarily expand your chest

cavity and lengthen your back, and only slightly move your belly. The movement in the chest and back is crucial for maintaining normal rib cage size and shape and for fostering healthy circulation around the spine.

Myth #9
A normal spine has a pronounced "S" shape curve.

Medical professionals are to blame for this one. The average person has poor posture, and the average person's spine reflects this. Doctors have mistaken the average in the population for normal and even ideal. As long as we maintain faulty notions about posture, and continue to get poor results from faulty recommendations, we are not going to be very motivated to work on our structure. A normal spine actually has very light curvature (except at the final spinal disc (L5-S1).

Myth #10
Good posture naturally comes about from being physically fit and active.

This is like driving around with a crooked axle and hoping that that the driving will straighten it out. If you have poor posture, increased activity is not an efficient way to arrive at better posture and can even result in injuries instead of improvement. It is better to focus on posture in its own right, or on posture alongside increased activity. Once you have good posture, you will get much more out of your activity; activity will maintain your muscles and your posture. Posture and fitness help each other but for people who are "out of shape" posture is an easier, safer, and more efficient place to begin.