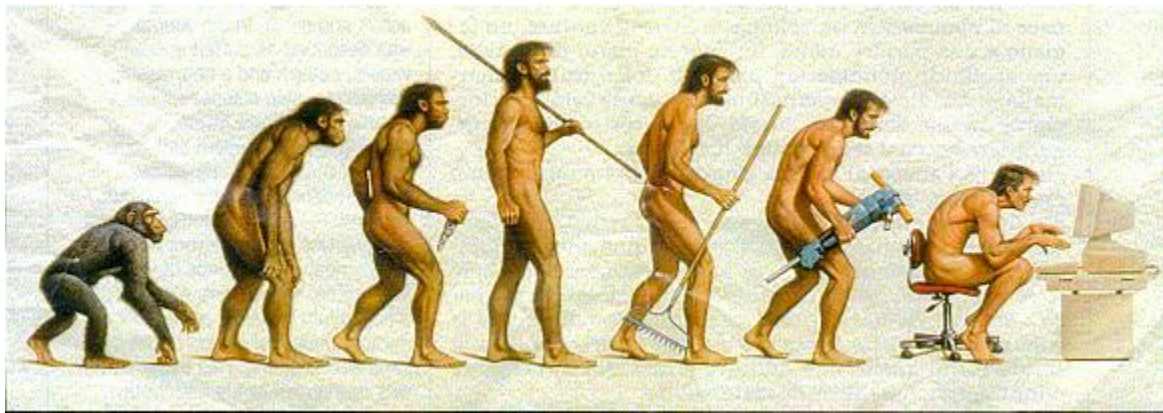


Better Posture, Happier You

Modern living has many positive aspects, however, it also has many negatives. One such negative is the new all too prevalent posture of man. Inactivity and excessive use of computers, tablets, etc... has caused many of us to constantly be in a hunched over position, causing the loss of ability to move efficiently, leading to a variety of injuries. If scientists were to update their development of man chart it would most likely look like the photo below.



Another prevalent issue today is depression. If you visualize a depressed person odds are you are seeing a person hunched over, not standing tall. In fact, studies have shown that postural traits commonly associated with depression include forward head flexion, increased thoracic kyphosis (hunched back), rounded shoulders, even gait patterns can be impacted by depression with slower walking speeds, less arm swing and decreases in vertical head movements.

These postural trait findings were based on a variety of comparisons, including medication and exercise interventions, pre- and post-depression episodes, and groups that had never been depressed or were in remission. What was encouraging amongst most of these studies was that as mood improved so did posture.

Does Improved Posture Mean Improved Mood?

Improving posture for better movement, reducing pain, and avoiding injuries are all well addressed, but what about improving posture to improve mood? Depression statistics continue their dismal climb with

major depressive disorder affecting 14.8 million American adults and mild depression affecting an additional 3.3 million in a given year. To a great extent depression treatment has centered on medication or cognitive behavioral therapy without much focus given to movement, or more specifically to posture, but that is beginning to change.

One entertaining study evaluated energy levels, a proposed indicator of depression, on body posture. University students were asked to rate their general depression and subjective energy levels, and were then randomly divided into two groups. One group was required to walk in a slouched position, the other to skip with a swinging cross-arm action. After their initial activity, they each ranked their subjective energy level, then switched activities, and once again ranked their energy level. Not surprising, skipping significantly increased their energy level and the slouched walking decreased energy levels. Imagine yourself skipping, swinging your arms, head up – did your energy level change just thinking about skipping? These students reported that skipping not only made them feel more energetic, but happier, more positive, and even evoked happy childhood memories, whereas the slouched walking made them feel sad, lonely, isolated, sleepy, or even “zombie-like”.

Positive thoughts and feelings are easier to create in an upright position. According to Harvard researcher Amy Cuddy a high power pose (such as that of a super hero with feet spread apart and arms on their hips) increases confidence by lowering the stress hormone cortisol.

Even evaluating the mood of a stick figure can be impacted by its posture. A straight, upright figure is judged as having the most positive mood while a figure displaying a posterior tilted pelvis with forward head and shoulders is rated as having the most negative emotions. With our overall decrease in physical activity and increased amount of time spent sitting hunched over our computers or personal devices, this “depressed” posture is where we spend so much of our time. Is the rise of depression related to this altered daily posture? I feel the answer is yes! If a high power pose increases confidence then it makes sense that a low power pose (rounded shoulders) will decrease confidence, and decreased confidence contributes to depression.

Addressing depression certainly requires getting assistance from health professionals (mental as well as physical) and poor posture may not be the only contributing factor, but I feel there is enough evidence to show that it IS a factor. Plus with all the injuries and conditions that result from poor posture, correcting postural issues is nothing but a win-win situation.

Below are some strategies for improving posture:

Sit straight

When you do have to work at a desk, sitting up with good, tall posture and your shoulders dropped is a good habit to get into. This can take some getting used to and you'll need to make a conscious effort to do so, but it's worth it. Also, make sure your workstation is set up to promote proper posture. Additionally, getting up and standing, walking around or stretching every half hour is advisable.

Strengthen your core

The muscles of your abdomen and pelvic area make up the core. These muscles form the foundation of good posture, and a strong core can have many other benefits including improved athletic performance. Pilates and yoga are great ways to build up the strength of your core, but there are also some great exercises you can do on your own. Click [here](#) to see some of the best core exercises.

Lift weights

A balanced strength training routine that engages each muscle group helps make a good supporting structure for the spine.

Stretch

Flexibility is a key part of good biomechanics. When muscles get tight other muscles have to work harder to help support the body. This leads to imbalances and over time to injuries.

Basically it takes a conscious effort to focus on sitting and standing with good posture. But with repetition it ultimately becomes natural. I would be happy to develop your own personalized better posture, happier you exercise program. Contact me to learn more.