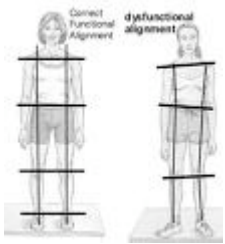


POSTURE, PAIN, & EXERCISE

We have all heard, “Sit up straight, keep your shoulders back, walk tall.” Besides the point that people look healthier and more confident with proper posture, posture is a major player in how efficiently we move. If you believe aging includes experiencing regular aches and pains, then this article may give you some hope and a new perspective. Our bodies were built were built to move. The old adage “move it or lose it” definitely applies – even in our capacity to perform daily activities. The development of technology has greatly enhanced our lifestyles. However, these advancements have also made us much more sedentary. Hence, muscles and tendons shorten, bone density decreases, and shoulders rolled forward, and our perfect design is no longer perfect. Why all this emphasis on posture? How does exercise affect posture? Or should the question be, “How does posture affect exercise?” There is a direct relationship between posture, our daily aches and pains, and how effectively we can exercise or move fluidly throughout our day.



The alignment shown on the left is how we are meant to be. Notice, from top to bottom, that the shoulder joint is in line with the hip joint which is in line with the knee joint which is in line with the ankle joint. Horizontally, each set of joints is parallel to the ground. When we live from this posture, we will be much less likely to have joint and muscle pain. In a comfortable and natural stance, take a good look at yourself. If you look more like the figure on the right (which is only one example..there are many others), your body has been busy compensating in order to allow you to move. Here are some ways in which you can see how your body has compensated (“compensating” is not a good thing):

- *Is one shoulder higher than the other?
- *Do your feet point outward (like a duck) or inward (pigeon toed)?
- *From the side view, (ask someone to look at you) is your ear in line with your shoulder joint?
- *Do your shoulders round forward with an accentuated rounder upper back?
- *Do your knee caps point in different directions?

*Does one hip sit higher than another?

*Look at the bottom of your shoes – is the wear the same on both shoes?

If you have any or all of these forms of compensation, I can guarantee you are in some sort of pain somewhere in your body; i.e., aching neck, feet, or lower back; a shoulder that hurts if you move a certain way, heel spurs, sciatica, plantar fasciitis, headaches, bunions – the list could go on. These conditions have been accepted by the public, but they are not par for the course! We use orthotics, braces, and avoid activities to cope with these conditions. What we are not looking at is how to correct our posture in order to alleviate pain and increase activity. When our joints are in alignment, the muscles pull on bones properly. When we are compensating, our muscles are pulling our bones in all kinds of different directions which will change how our joints move. Over time, pain is the result. By the time pain has shown up, your body has been compensating for a while. Pain is the last symptom!! There are specific movements/methods to correct posture. It will take time – generally about 6 months to a year.

Hopefully, with this information it will make sense that if you put exercise in the equation you are asking for serious trouble!! You are exercising while you are out of alignment – adding insult to injury....literally! You are having your joints operate under increased load or resistance while they are not even pointed in the proper direction. Do you see the problem here? When working with a trainer, their first concern should be to get your body back to its proper alignment. “Corrective exercises” is one term they may use. If they simply jump you into a routine without working toward aligning your first – pain will stop you!