

Experts give advice on how to improve posture, combat signs of aging

By Marisa Ramiccio | August 30, 2012

What does your posture say about you? Is it obvious that you have a desk job? Can others tell that you often bury your nose in a book? You may not realize it, but your posture can reveal a lot about your habits and your health.

"It has a lot of [meaning], especially in our world because posture is a result of genetics as well as habits," said Dr. Steven Weiniger, an expert on posture and author of [Stand Taller Live Longer: An Anti-Aging Strategy](#).

Weiniger said the things people do on a daily basis can form their bodies into a certain shape. If, for instance, someone spends eight to 10 hours on the computer every day, that person's body will get used to staying in a hunched-over position.

"The problem with that is if you look at people who are aging well, are they huddled over or standing straight?" he said.

Yes, weak posture can age you. If you have weak posture, it can not only make you look older than you are, but it can also cause a host of health problems as you age.

"If I'm in a parking lot and I see a energetic man in his 60s with good posture, he's probably not on any medication, said Dr. Matt Herba, a chiropractor at Herba Family Chiropractic in Winter Springs. "But if I see a 30-year-old woman with her head bent forward, she's sure to be on some medication [for] sickness and disease."

Aside from looking like a hunchback, a bent head can cause a host of problems in and of itself. For every inch that your head moves forward, Herba said, it puts 10 extra pounds of pressure on your body.

"Also, one of the major things is that if your head goes forward, you close off endorphin centers [and] that leads to things like chronic pain," Herba said.

Other common problems that the weak-postured are likely to experience include arthritis, back pain, decreased oxygenation and a shorter range of motion.

Herba said that the way that he likes to treat weak posture is proactively, not reactively. The earlier you treat the signs and symptoms, the better chance you have of correcting your posture. But before you get your body back in line, it's important to see how weak your posture really is.



"The first exercise we teach people is to take a posture picture," Weiniger said. "That's where you have someone take a picture of you from the front, back and sides, and you use the picture as a benchmark."

Posture pictures can also be used to track your progress over time. But, if you think the person in the picture looks more like your grandparent than yourself, don't get discouraged - and don't automatically label your posture as "bad."

"The problem with the phrasing is that it makes it an attribute. It sounds like you can't do anything about it," Weiniger said. "A different way of looking at posture is weak and strong. If I tell you your posture is functionally weak, you can say 'What can I do about it?'"

There's plenty you can do to correct weak posture including standing taller, balancing on a medicine ball and doing cross-crawl exercises such as swimming, skateboarding and wakeboarding. Weiniger said that even if you're at a place where you can't exercise, such as at the office or at school, it's important to get up and move as much as possible.

A patient of Weiniger's, Jimmy Goolsby, said that exercising greatly improved his posture and his back pain.

"I have a chronic back injury from when I used to play collegiate tennis," Goolsby said. "It gave me problems with spasms and was very random."

A few years ago, Goolsby's back injury flared up to the point where he had no feeling from his foot to his kneecap and had to consider undergoing surgery. Goolsby, who has worked with Weiniger since 1988, said that he started practicing the doctor's exercises again, this time more diligently.

In the end, those exercises not only strengthened his back muscles and his posture, but they relieved Goolsby of his pain to the point that he is no longer a candidate for surgery.

"I feel better now at 56 years old than when I was 46 years old," he said.

Although not everyone may have the same results as Goolsby, by practicing posture exercises at least three to four times a week, you're likely to notice some visual changes in two to three months.

For more information on posture and corrective exercises, visit <http://www.bodyzone.com>

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