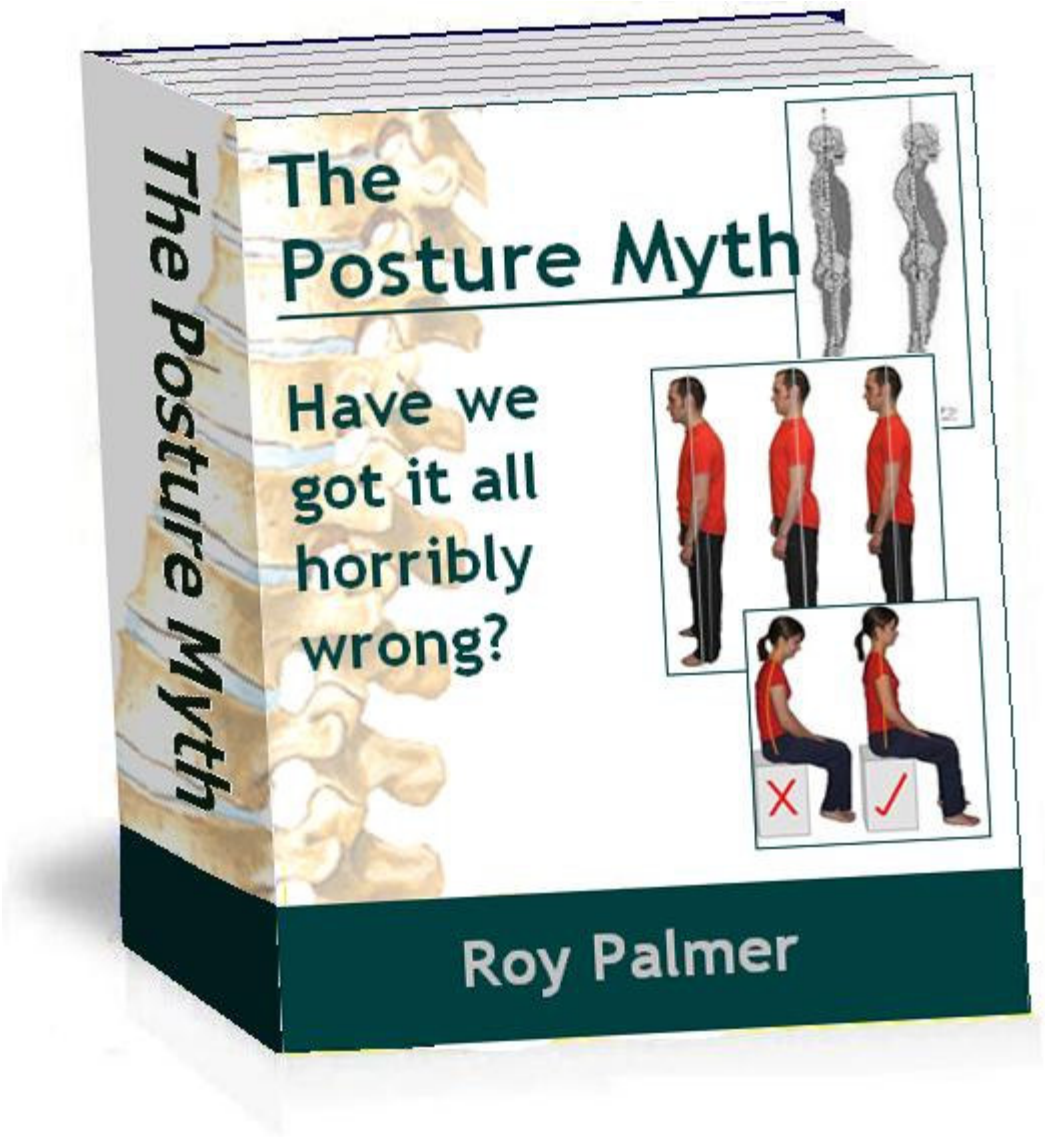

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If you are currently experiencing back pain or have a condition we recommend you seek medical advice before beginning a new program.

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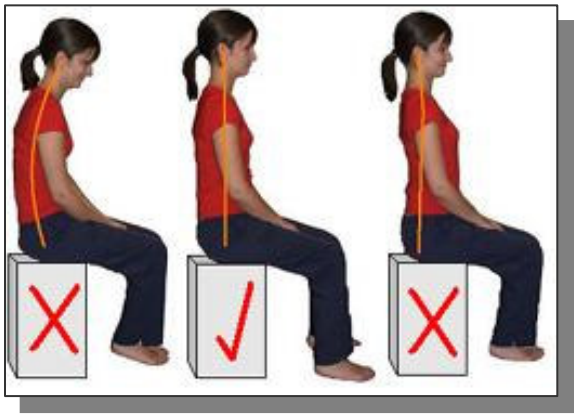
Introduction

Posture is something we first become aware of when our parents or a teacher tells us to ‘sit up straight’ or ‘stop slouching’. It’s a subject most of us come to loathe! When you’re young you do not really want to be thinking about how to sit and stand when you can be having fun.

This is the start of when it can go wrong. Either we rebel and deliberately annoy our elders and slump, or we take their advice and try to do it. This invariably involves tightening the lower back of pulling ourselves out of one undesirable shape into another even less desirable from a structural point of view. We add tension in the wrong place and try to hold it, but we either get distracted forget to ‘do it’ or, more likely, we quickly become uncomfortable and collapse back to our familiar posture.

This highlights the big issues we have with posture. Why do we develop poor posture initially and then, how on earth are we supposed to correct it? This ebook looks at the myths surrounding posture and suggests a more realistic solution to addressing the issue.



How do we get it so wrong?

The Posture Myth

Posture is a term to describe shape whether good or bad. Poise is either present or absent at any moment so to describe poise as good or bad is to misunderstand its meaning. The term posture is generally accepted to relate to the dynamic relationship of the body segments in activity. Poise is a state; an ability to maintain appropriate muscle tension at all times in both movement and static positions.

A well-balanced body is supported with minimal effort. Good posture is considered vital for health and functioning of the internal organs and all bodily functions. A poorly balanced body requires more muscular effort to maintain position and initiate movement.

Poor posture is seen as a widespread problem afflicting the majority of the adult population prompting anthropologist Raymond Dart to refer to it as ‘the pandemic condition of malposture’. As far back as 1945 malposture was regarded as a problem that required intervention. A study in the United States prepared for the White House Conference for Child Health and Hygiene assessed the physical abilities of a wide cross section of children. The subjects were monitored performing a number of simple acts such as standing, sitting and squatting. The number of older children ‘exhibiting poor body mechanics’ was a staggering eighty per cent!

If poor posture cannot be attributed to a specific medical condition, it is most likely to be something we are doing to ourselves that is to blame. So how do we develop poor posture? The conventional view is that it is due to habits developed through laziness and to treat the condition we therefore need to try harder to improve it. A lazy attitude may contribute to the problem, but not in the manner we might expect. Once a habit is learnt it cannot be unlearnt by trying harder.

Good posture is seen to have many advantages. From an aesthetic point of view it can enhance image, sending out the right signals (body language).

But what is a good posture? We recognise poor posture when we see it, as it is evident in the majority of adults. But just to confuse the matter, people with an ideal 'plumb-line' posture can also have poor movement patterns. This is because *it is not the shape that is important but how it is maintained*. An apparent 'good' posture can be achieved with totally inappropriate muscular activity.

The distinguished physiologist Charles Sherrington once described our systems for maintaining posture as the 'most uncertain and untrustworthy of all'. This is not encouraging when all corrective methods for improving posture rely on the very systems that are the cause of the problem. The fact that posture can deteriorate suggests something can go wrong with the 'systems' that should maintain it.

The conventional definition of good posture is the correct alignment of body parts supported by the right amount of muscle tension. This view has led to the development of exercises to tone up postural muscles diagnosed as weak in order to achieve the ideal shape. Attaining good posture then became an end in itself. However, these methods do not go deep enough to address the cause and are consequently based on a partial understanding of the condition.

We have to think of posture as more than just shape. Our posture is a result of our attitude to life, 'body knowledge' plus our lifestyle and not simply a matter of muscle tone. Every pathway from your brain leads eventually to a muscle. Our state of mind therefore influences every move and muscle action, to put it another way - ***we are what we think***. A sports commentator may use the phrases, 'their heads have dropped' or 'the spring has gone from their step' to describe the losing side. In contrast the winning side will have 'their heads held high' or be 'walking

tall'. It is no accident that many phrases used to describe attitude are bodily in nature, such as 'stiff necked' and 'spineless'. Words used to express physical attributes, such as 'balanced' and 'centered', are also suitable to describe character. 'Attitude' also applies to both.

Looking Good

Conventional exercises devised to correct poor posture fail to recognise the cause and cannot therefore offer a long-term solution. The wrong concept of a problem leads to seeking the wrong solution. The assumption that the problem can be corrected by strengthening the weaker muscles through exercise is misguided. This superficial approach ignores the cause and simply tries to correct the symptom.

Our body is shaped by how we **use** it. Habit determines use and subsequent condition of muscle; therefore it is the underlying habits that need to change. Poor muscle tone is *not* the root cause of poor posture – it's a symptom in itself; it is the mechanisms that control muscle that are at fault. Attempts to correct posture by exercise achieve, at best, temporary aesthetic results, or complicate the problem by consolidating the poor habits that led to the condition. Trying to correct posture through exercise involves the same faulty patterns guided by a poor sense of body awareness. If we can unknowingly get ourselves into this state, how are we to know the way out of it? I repeat, exercises do not change habits - they re-enforce them!

Common Misconceptions About Posture

The initial mistake made by the pioneers of exercises to improve posture was to confuse the outward sign of poise, that is, the good posture of gifted individuals, for the desirable goal. Changing the body to look right does not attain poise. The methods designed to correct posture are flawed and based on the following misconceptions.

- ***"We can control individual muscles."*** We do not have direct control over individual muscles, only the movement. When we choose to move, the movement is organised by subconscious centres of the brain that do not contain individual muscle actions. Try to contract the biceps muscle without thinking of moving your arm and you can begin to appreciate how it works. What we sense is a feeling associated with that movement and not the muscle. We cannot know if an action lengthens, shortens or even uses a muscle, only that we have performed a movement we associate with the feel of it.

One exercise system to improve posture even goes to the extreme of instructing participants to engage the postural muscles in each exercise to twenty-five percent of its strength! This level of control is just not possible.

- ***"The problem is with the muscle."*** Posture is the manifestation of attitude. Exercises designed to strengthen the perceived weak postural muscles do not get to the cause of the problem. If a muscle is weak, it is most likely through lack of use if not activated due to a faulty movement pattern. If you don't use it, you lose it! A muscle can also appear weak if it is habitually held tight because further contraction is not possible. Our shape is a result of an intricate balancing act involving

every muscle of the body. Weakness in one area usually indicates excessive tension in another.

The task of trying to achieve balance by working on individual groups of muscle is not only time consuming but pointless. What are we trying to achieve if we do not know what is the correct tone for each muscle? In recent years there has been a move toward 'functional exercises' designed for a specific sport. The theory is that each sport will place demands on a particular group of muscles so exercises can be used to strengthen those required by the athlete. Yet if these muscles are deemed to be essential for their sport then surely the athlete participating in that sport should already have the appropriate strength where required. Changes in one part of the body achieved with exercise will bring about, often unexpected, results in another. Muscles perform their function as directed by the controlling mechanism. Postural exercises call into play the same mechanisms that created the poor condition in a more vigorous manner. The result is 'stronger' muscles at the mercy of the faulty controlling mechanisms. The careless driver now has a more powerful car.

- ***"We know what good posture feels like."*** The knowledge of how to maintain good posture has never been at a conscious level. The absence of poor habits allows good posture in children without us having to 'do it'. Once habits start to interfere with the process and posture deteriorates we cannot know what to do to get it back. It is foolish to believe we can improve on what should be a natural process by trying harder. In order to perform corrective exercises it is assumed an individual knows how to use the muscle in question with the appropriate amount of tension. If we had this ability we would never have developed poor posture initially. The underlying condition causing poor posture cannot be used to improve it. Poor posture is a symptom and should not

be addressed by direct means. To know what good posture 'feels' like, we need to have it.

- ***"To correct posture we need to try harder."*** In fact the opposite is true. The centres of the brain that control the postural reflexes are at a level below conscious awareness and are therefore beyond our direct control. Any attempt to correct posture by a conscious act will interfere with this process. The common response by those wishing to 'correct' their immediate posture is to stiffen up, shorten the back, hold the breath and adopt the military stance. Young children are often used as an example of good posture, yet they give no consideration to it. They allow it happen by not interfering with the process. To achieve 'good posture' we need to learn *what not to do* so as not to impede the postural reflexes. For example, let's look at the common sitting postures again. How many of us spend most of our lives sitting at a desk?

A **B** **C**

See my **sitting posture video** for an example of how to correct your chair posture with out causing more discomfort.

Probably the most common sitting posture is the slouch or slump (**A**). This puts unnecessary stress on the neck and shoulder muscles as they struggle to support the weight of the head (average weight 10 lbs/ 4.5 k) It will also effect your breathing, circulation and digestion. In the long term it will shorten your stature. When trying to correct it most of us will adopt something like position (**B**). We tighten the lower back and push the chest forward because as a child this position satisfied out parents and teachers. However, this puts a strain on the lower back, fixes the ribs making breathing harder and leads to aches and pains. Now look at (**C**). This position requires the least amount of effort and will not lead to the side effects of A and B. To achieve this requires an 'undoing' of the bad habits that lead to loss of poise.

The same principle applies to standing posture.

- ***"Good posture improves performance."*** As described earlier in this section, good posture does appear to promote efficient movement, however we need to go deeper to understand why. This view puts the cart before the horse. It is the ability for efficient movement that promotes good posture. Good posture is an indication of poise consequently poor posture is a sign of lost poise. A poised individual moves freely with minimal effort and is not pulled out of shape by excessive muscle tension. A person without poise uses inappropriate muscle action in all activities, *including the exercises prescribed to correct posture*. If an individual has poise, corrective exercises are unnecessary and could even lead to its loss.

If an individual does not have poise, corrective exercises are counterproductive serving only to complicate the problem. Postural exercises may show improvements to shape, but by whose yardstick and at what cost to poise? The shape is not important. A better shape and sense of feeling stronger is not necessarily a good result. In a poised person the

appropriate muscular activity to maintain balance is activated by postural reflexes. When the reflex excites the muscle we experience only the movement, not the effort. For example when the patella (knee) reflex is tested we have no sensation of applying effort to move the leg because we receive feedback of effort only if we have voluntarily activated the muscle. In standing we do not need to voluntarily control muscular activity directly and therefore should have little sensation of strength. If we 'feel' stronger we are probably overworking the muscle. Exercises for developing specific muscles do not promote the balance and integration required for poise. New habits are learnt by using muscle to perform moves that may not correspond to their natural function. The postural reflexes in conjunction with the learnt pattern co-ordinate muscle activity for balance without the need for extra effort.

Exercises designed to improve posture could therefore have the unexpected side effect of restricting movement. When we engage the habits developed through exercise to attain what we assume to be 'correct' position or movement, we interfere with preparatory actions for movement.

I believe targeting the postural muscles for specific exercise encourages inappropriate use for actions that they are not intended to perform, ultimately leading to loss of poise.

The Core Stability Myth

It's practically impossible to visit a gym, personal trainer or even a therapist with poor posture or a sports injury without someone suggesting that you 'work on your core'. Weak core muscles have become the latest 'cause' of human suffering and therefore many exercises have been devised to strengthen them. But before we all rush out to embrace this philosophy let's look at it in greater detail.

In 1989 the International Union of Physiological Sciences Conference debated the head-neck sensory motor systems as a factor in movement and balance. As a result, over one hundred papers were written on the subject in the following three years. In the editor's preface to the publications Berthoz wrote: "The need for a thorough analysis of all aspects of head movement control is all the more important because head movements are a core element of orienting behaviour involving a number of interactive sensory and motor systems."

It is therefore difficult to explain and justify the current popularity of exercises used by many therapists to promote what is known as 'core stability'. These exercises were devised in response to the perceived problem of poor support. The patient is encouraged to concentrate on using specific muscles to stabilise the core to support an area known to have a weakness. The problem with this action is that it is contrary to the function of the nervous system.

Gerald Gottlieb, a respected scientist working in the field of motor control stresses that one of the functions of our central nervous system is to minimize muscle stress. This, he argued, is why we should not override this directive by concentrating on individual muscle activation during activity. Are we in danger of over doing it when we try to control the actions of specific muscles? Remember this is physiologically impossible

anyway! Whilst the nervous system is in favour of minimising stress to help maintain free joint movement and reduce pressure on the internal organs, we are consciously doing the opposite.

Following on the back of this paper the late sports scientist Dr Mel Siff wrote:

> **"how can one prescribe specific set ways of recruiting muscles in any complex natural movement if research now shows that these highly deterministic patterns of muscle action are not characteristic of human movement?"**

and

> **"Research into motor control has never shown that training of individual muscle actions enhances skilled complex motor activities."**

The maxim of "**the body knows of movements, not muscles**" is constantly reiterated to emphasise this fundamental point. The learning of the motor skills required to execute a given sporting movement are acquired by regular practice of the movement itself, not by teaching isolated joint or muscle actions that are believed to play some contributory role in the sporting movement.

We should not attempt to directly control muscle recruitment for movement or exercise, it should be the thought of an act that initiates our total muscle response and the subsequent movement that determines ongoing involvement. When the managing director decides to sweep the factory floor instead of staying in the boardroom making the big decisions, he interferes with the operation of the whole organisation.

If our innate balance mechanisms are allowed to perform their function unimpeded there is no need to consciously engage muscle or strengthen

the middle of the structure independently. In the absence of interference, the reflexes responding to gravity will help to ensure optimum balance and movement.

Mulder and Hulstyn's research published over twenty years ago ('Sensory feedback therapy and theoretical knowledge of motor control and learning'. Am J Phys Med 63:226-244, 1984.) stated

> **"Normal movement does not consist of isolated actions that are cortically controlled. Rather it is a sequence of synergic movement patterns that are functionally related. Besides initiating muscle activation, which produces the movement, synergies also serve to maintain equilibrium. Therefore, another goal of treatment may be to improve dynamic postural and movement synergies available, decreasing the tendency for excessive and prolonged recruitment of muscle activity to stabilise posture during movement. Thus, muscle re-education sequences should NOT be performed in isolated movements. Instead they should be incorporated immediately into functional, goal-oriented tasks".**

More recently Stuart McGill Ph.D (Physiology) published a paper stating

> **"The task of daily living is not compromised by insufficient strength but rather insufficient endurance. After an injury it has been demonstrated that the motor system loses its fitness, and abnormal relationships of muscle activity occur. Endurance training is emerging to be far more important in stabilizing the spine than strength. Strong abdominal muscles do not provide the preventive or therapeutic benefit that was thought. Sit ups, with knees bent or even abdominal crunches have not demonstrated any real benefit for the low back. Further, pelvic tilts may actually make the low back worse. There is little**

> **support for low back flexibility to improve back health and reduce the risk of future back trouble. Research is demonstrating that endurance has a much greater preventive value than strength. In fact, emphasis on endurance should precede specific strengthening exercise in a gradual exercise program. Increasing evidence supports endurance exercise in both reducing the incidence of low back injury and as treatment. This would include such daily activities as walking, cycling, swimming or repetitive low demand exercise to specific muscles. Co-operative muscle activity is a necessary prerequisite to obtain the desired endurance. That co-operative muscle activity is dependent on proper joint mechanical motion as is proper joint motion dependent on co-operative muscle activity."**

also

> **"…spinal stability is achieved with very low levels of abdominal co-contraction, focusing on a single muscle is misguided, and that "sucking in" the TVA in fact compromises, not improves, spinal stability."**

So perhaps a misunderstanding of the problem has led to a short-term remedy. A number of therapists are starting to question the thinking behind core stabilisation techniques as to date there is no convincing clinical evidence to prove their effectiveness. Because it may appear to achieve a result and ‘feel’ good it is not surprising to find the core stabilisation theory featuring in numerous popular exercise philosophies.

Again Dr Siff writes: -

> **"At the very outset, we have to dispel the belief that it is possible to focus on 'core stability' on its own. Unless one's entire body is off the ground or is immersed in water, the idea of**

> **stabilising the core separate from other parts of the body is sheer nonsense, since the ability of the core in all sports in which one is in touch with a static or moving surface depends strongly on peripheral stability (the limbs).If one is carrying out some movement such as lifting weights, doing aerobics, running, jumping or playing some ground-based sport, the body stabilises as a whole, with interacting contributions from the periphery and the core….. The world of core stabilisation currently remains far too heavily based in marketing and belief than in valid science. "**

The actions encouraged to promote core stability may feel like they are strengthening the centre of our body. In the absence of ‘valid science’, they appear to protect the spine because it must make sense to support the body from the centre. But the theory ignores the role that limbs play in maintaining stability and the overall controlling influence of the balance and righting reflexes. The few disciplines that do recognise the importance of the head, neck and back relationship resort to what they know best to ‘improve’ it - exercising the muscles of the neck! The exercises designed to achieve this have the effect of increasing interference in an area that requires none.

FM Alexander, founder of The Alexander Technique, looked to promote appropriate use of the head, neck and back muscles by removing the habits that prevent it. This, he argued, would allow the body's innate reflexes to activate the muscles accordingly to maintain balance and support. If these reflexes were not functioning resulting in poor posture, he concluded the problem lay with the near universal habit of excessive application of effort to perform even simple actions. This has to be addressed first before any other intervention to correct the problem. In reality the only thing we can directly do in relation to the righting reflexes is to unknowingly interfere with their function. Anthropologist, Raymond

Dart, wrote: The prime factor about human body movement is that it entails the co-operation or integration of both conscious and unconscious mechanisms, i.e. the ‘will’ and the ‘reflex’. To achieve the level of integration necessary for optimum movement we need to prevent the conditions likely to impede this co-operation.

If the amount of effort applied to a task is excessive, the resulting muscle activity is likely to interfere with the reflex by reducing sensitivity. Activation of the reflex could either be delayed or even totally restricted. When the reflex is finally activated, movement is limited due to the reduced capacity of a shortened muscle to contract further or its inability to lengthen when required.

Alexander stressed that if we stop doing the wrong things the right things take care of themselves. If we learn to stop stiffening the neck, the head will ‘find’ its own balance and bring about the most appropriate muscle tone for the current situation to facilitate our innate righting reflexes. As we do not know what the optimum tone should be for each muscle it is not something we should try to achieve. Activities performed with minimal interference with our balance mechanisms will ensure the most appropriate muscle response. Good quality movement promotes the right type of conditioning and removes the need for additional ‘specialist’ exercises.

So how do we attain good movement in order to get into shape? First we need to establish what it is we have been doing to get out of shape, and then we have to learn to stop doing it before we attempt anything else.

Promoting Poise

Poise is not acquired through conventional exercises that generally concentrate on the muscle. As discussed earlier in this ebook, many exercises lead to loss of poise through the piecemeal approach to developing individual muscles or muscle groups in isolation. Poise comes with an understanding and experience of free movement.

Balance is vital for poise. The common response to perceived loss of balance is to stiffen in order to prevent a fall. We need to feel at ease with movement to remove the fear of falling. When we use inappropriate corrective actions in response to a perceived loss of balance we increase the risk of a fall. The grace exhibited by practitioners of the martial art Aikido (see below) is due to their ability to fall without fear of injury.

Regardless of the condition of the nervous system, balance can be improved by learning how to eliminate the unnecessary preparatory acts that we usually associate with a given movement. Try the following experiment.

1. Look down at your feet, walk forward and make a note of how this feels such as how heavy is foot contact with the floor.

2. Now put your fingers into the groove just behind your ear lobes. In between your fingers and almost level with your eyes is the top of your spine where you head sits. This is much higher and forward than most people would guess.

3. Now look ahead and walk forward once more keeping in mind where your head is balanced on your spine. This may feel different because the head is now sitting on top of the spine and requires little work from the neck and shoulder muscles to keep it there. Previously when we looked down at the floor this would have taken us off balance and put strain onto joints where it should not have been.

Observe most people walking or running and you will see heads held in a number of positions though rarely left free to balance.

The muscles of the neck play a vital role in maintaining balance and controlling movement. Medical scientist Dr David Garlick has conducted a number of studies on The Alexander Technique and describes in his book, The Lost Sixth Sense (1990), what happens when a local anaesthetic is injected into one side of the subject neck muscles: -

> **".. the person reported he felt drawn to one side 'like a bar of iron to a strong magnet'. The subject was unable to walk with any co-ordination but very much like a drunken person. When lying down he felt as if 'the couch was toppling over toward the side of the injection."**

He continues: -

> **This is dramatic evidence of how important sensory nerve inputs from neck muscles are, affecting as they do the brain's control of posture and movement. The effect of neck muscle inputs are**

comparable in importance to the inputs from the organs of balance in the inner ear (semi-circular or vestibular canals).

The head contains the important special sensory organs of sight, hearing, smell and taste. As stimuli act on these senses, the head is turned to detect better a particular stimulus. Any movement of the head is detected with exquisite sensitivity by the neck muscle receptors. The strong inputs from the neck muscles then affect the muscles of the trunk and limbs to prepare the person to respond to the stimulus.

The high concentration of muscle spindles in the muscles attached to the base of the skull give an indication of their importance to the nervous system. Their role is thought to be that of feeding back information on the position of the head enabling the righting reflexes to maintain body position in relation to its movement. This explains why the neck hold is so effective in combat sports as it can immobilise a contestant, the same technique can apparently be used to restrain a bull!

The complex reflexes of this region can be impaired by excessive tension in the neck muscles. For example the deeper, highly sensitive sub-occipital group of muscles cannot adequately be lengthened, thus activating the stretch reflex, if the outer trapezius is pulling the head back. Because the stretch reflex is fundamental to movement, the efficiency of any action is reduced if initiated by stiffening the neck.

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of the sub-occipital muscles on the function of muscles in the lower back and legs (Pollard & Ward (1997)).

The weight of the head on the spine acts as a first class lever to counteract gravity. If the head is allowed to balance, that is unimpeded by unnecessary activity in the neck and shoulder muscles, its weight

provides an upward pull on the attached muscle increasing tone. The slight forward rotation of the head on top of the spine increases the distance between the back of the skull (occipital and mastoid bones) and the vertebral column, sternum and clavicle.

This stretches the muscles attached at these points eliciting the stretch reflex. An increase in muscle tone supports the structures beneath, reducing the amount of unnecessary tension. Rather than holding up the body in individual segments, the structure is supported effectively from above - courtesy of gravity. When the head is balanced its weight is transferred down the spine as nature intended, calling into play the hydraulic property of the intervertebral discs. The lengthening of the spine increases flexibility, improves muscle tone and the ability to absorb shock.

To achieve the level of integration necessary for optimum movement we need to prevent the conditions likely to impede this co-operation. If the amount of effort applied to a task is excessive, the resulting muscle activity is likely to interfere with the reflex by reducing sensitivity. Activation of the reflex could either be delayed or even totally restricted. When the reflex is finally activated, movement is limited due to the reduced capacity of a shortened muscle to contract further or its inability to lengthen when required.

If we stop doing the wrong things the right things take care of themselves. If we learn to stop stiffening the neck, the head will ‘find’ its own balance and bring about the most appropriate muscle tone for the current situation to facilitate our innate righting reflexes. As we do not know what the optimum tone should be for each muscle it is not something we should try to achieve. Activities performed with minimal interference with our balance mechanisms will ensure the most appropriate muscle response.

Good quality movement promotes the right type of conditioning and removes the need for additional ‘specialist’ exercises.

So how do we attain good movement in order to get into shape? First we need to establish what it is we have been doing to get out of shape, and then we have to learn to stop doing it before we attempt anything else.

The most common actions that interfere with poise are

- **Tightening the jaw**
- **Pulling back the head**
- **Pushing the chest out**
- **Pulling in the lower back**
- **Bracing the legs**
- **Stiffening the ankles**

I have observed these actions in myself and the majority of people I have taught over the last ten years. They rarely exist in isolation and I would say that one leads to the rest happening.

A good test to see if you are interfering with your movement, and hence contributing to changes in your posture, is the chair test. Try this for yourself.

1. Sit on the edge of a chair and think about getting up.

2. Observe what you want to do to get out of the chair. Do any of the above actions appear? Do you feel you need to use your arms? None of these actions actually help – they will in fact make it harder.

3. Now try to get out of the chair without preparing by getting set.

To see the impact of these preparations on movement please see this **video** on my website.

You will probably find it quite difficult to get up from the chair without getting ready in a familiar way because it is your habit – it's a hardwired response to getting up.

Poise can only be achieved when you can change your habitual muscle actions that invariably contain actions that impede coordination. Exercises to correct posture DO NOT address these habits, or in other words, the underlying cause of poor posture and movement. When you can move without undue stress on your body your muscles will 're-balance' themselves and your posture will improve dramatically!

Why exercise is the last thing you should do to improve your posture

What is the first thing you think about when you decided to do something about your posture? I'm guessing it was exercise. If your posture is poor then surely you will need to start a rigorous program of corrective exercises right away! This is because everyone from your doctor, physical therapist, personal trainer and the man on the train will tell you exercise is the only way to correct bad posture. So it must be right then.

Did you know if you repeat something often enough people will begin to believe it as it gains credibility through repetition. A good example is the urban myth. I'm sure you have heard or read somewhere that we only use 10%, 5% or even just 1% of our brain's capacity. Intelligence enhancing programs are marketed with this myth because it sounds feasible and has been used so many times. This statistic is completely false but many people you meet will believe it.

The same is true of corrective posture exercises. Did you know that no study has ever proved they have any long term benefits for your posture? It's interesting that so many therapists continue to use the exercise approach when no evidence proves its effectiveness. Yes there are studies that show by exercising your transverse abdominals you will strengthen them (no surprise there really!) but as for the overall benefit to your posture and coordination – no conclusive results.

Let's just spend a few moments considering the exercise approach to correcting poor posture. The theory goes that a weakness in a muscle or group of muscles is causing your body to lose its natural, upright posture. So parts of your body are collapsing due to lack of support and other parts

have to work harder to keep you balanced. This explains the aches and pains that often go with poor posture.

So what is the best way to strengthen a weak muscle? Exercise of course! Just do this movement twenty times a day and soon everything will be right again. But just wait a moment. Let's consider why a particular muscle is weak and not performing its function correctly. Are you familiar with the term 'use it or lose it'? If a muscle has become weak it is usually because you are not using it.

If you slump all day in a chair you will get better at slumping and use your extensor muscles in the back less and less until they become weak. If you are not using the right muscles to do the right job it's a coordination or 'body use' problem.

Imagine you took your car to the garage and the mechanic reports you have damaged the gears. The part needs to be changed and that is going to cost you big time. Sounds reasonable doesn't it? What if the mechanic says you will have to change that part every month because it's the way you drive that is causing the problem? Not so reasonable, just think of the cost and time involved! You would, of course, take action to assess your skills and learn how to drive your car in a way that doesn't cause damage.

So what is your therapist advising you to do when they suggest exercise to improve your posture?

"You have some weak muscles and need to spend time each day to strengthen them. And this will be done using movements that have nothing in common with your everyday movements."

What questions should you ask your therapist?

Will I have to continue to do them for long periods?

When I stop will they remain strong or will they start to get weaker again?

Will the exercises make me sit, stand and move with less effort?

Wouldn't it make sense for your therapist to show you how to 'use' your body in a way that didn't cause 'muscle imbalances'? Yet if you asked you might find the advice starts to get a bit limiting such as 'sit up straight', 'work on your core muscles' etc etc. As we have seen earlier this advice leaves much to be desired and if we knew how to sit properly we would already be doing it!

Even if an intense period of exercise did help your posture would you spend all that time doing them? If there was an easier, more scientific approach to getting a better posture that didn't require exercise wouldn't you give that a chance?

If your posture is poor it is because muscles aren't doing what they are supposed to do. But remember, you are the one who is telling them what to do!

Exercises that have nothing in common with everyday movements, work on muscles in a piecemeal manner and encourage the 'wrong sort of effort' will not deliver any long term benefits.

So the sensible, scientific way to approach the problem would be to find out where you are going wrong. The unnecessary actions mentioned in the previous section are a good place to start. A better understanding of how you can use gravity to lessen the effort you put into all your activities is another key factor in getting a better posture. Combine a knowledge of

your own body, mind and the role of gravity and your posture will start to resume it's natural shape.

More information about The Alexander Technique and my approach to posture can be found by visiting **The Posture Pages** on my website.

Why Not Put The Theory To The Test!

How To Improve Your Posture *Without* Exercise

You will know, after reading this eBook, that exercise or just trying to stand and sit 'correctly' will not ultimately change or improve your posture. As a teacher of the world-renowned **Alexander Technique**, I use tried and tested methods to resolve the bad habits that cause poor posture.

In this unique program you will learn how you can let your body balance and support itself with minimal effort. The end result – improved posture, fewer aches and pains, better performance and you will look and feel more confident!

For more information about this program please **click here**

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About the author

Runner, cricket coach, martial artist and published author, Roy has over 25 years experience in competitive sport and has spent the last 10 studying performance enhancement. Like many of us, he often had annoying injury problems, coupled with backache and fatigue, but thought they were just 'normal'. Until, that is, he realised he was actually causing them himself. Conventional therapies would work temporarily but only as long as it took for him to repeat the same injury-causing habit.

After developing better movement through the Alexander Technique, he began to enjoy sport again and gave up a career in telecommunications to complete his three-year full-time training to teach the Technique. He now achieves greater performance in his own sports than he did 10 years ago!

Roy works with people in many different sports and activities. He is an active contributor to regular sports forums around the world, including Greg Chappell's Cricket Academy. He also applies his knowledge to help children with learning difficulties, challenges with handwriting and co-ordination, behavioural problems and dyslexia. Roy is available for one-to-one sessions, group workshops and bespoke corporate programmes.

My experience of The Alexander Technique

One of my ambitions in my late teens was to run a marathon and for many months my life revolved around achieving it, to the extent of overlooking one vital aspect that seemed so obvious with hindsight. I followed a strict diet and training timetable but made one big mistake - I neglected to

assess my running technique because in common with most people I assumed I knew how to run.

Each day on returning from work I would put on my running kit, warm-up and head off for my run. I eventually achieved my ambition by finishing a marathon in 1984 but not before aggravating a condition that would frustrate me for the next ten years. Shortly after the marathon I began to experience back pain whilst running which became gradually worse until I felt some level of discomfort in most of my activities.

At the time I blamed running so I promptly gave up and moved onto martial arts to satisfy my need for physical activity and competitive sport. I consulted a fitness coach and took advice on exercises to improve my condition. For a while this seemed to help but as I progressed in karate I began to experience difficulties again. The decision to change sport turned out to be misguided as the culprit was not the running itself, but how I ran. This problem was waiting to happen and existed before I began training. The build up to the marathon accelerated the condition due to more vigorous activity, changing my sport was not going to solve this problem as this time it was how I applied myself to karate.

For my back pain I received treatment from an osteopath on a weekly basis for about six months. The benefits would last for several days before the aches and pains returned. I went on to consult a physical therapist and chiropractor with much the same result. Thanks to the treatment I received from these therapists I gained a welcome relief from my symptoms but the cause of my problem was a little closer to home – it was me! As soon as I left the treatment room I began to undo the results achieved by the therapist as I resorted to my usual harmful habits. I also had been using these habits to do the exercises as advised by my fitness coach - serving only to re-enforce the poor habits.

After a number of years of this cycle I had reached the point of being prepared to try anything and this is how I came to hear about The Alexander Technique. I read an article in a newspaper and was intrigued by what it had to say. I promptly found a teacher in my area and booked a course of lessons. Soon after starting I began to appreciate the different approach required to address my predicament: instead of complaining of my back hurting me I began to ask 'what am I doing with myself to cause this pain?' Later I came to realise that the back pain itself was just a symptom of a more fundamental problem – I had lost the ability of natural movement partly due to, paradoxically, my preoccupation with exercise and sport. Whilst I had thrown myself into every new sport with enthusiasm and vigour I had not considered whether I knew how to 'use' my body well enough to be able to do this. This had not been assessed by my fitness coach who could only assess whether I performed the exercises correctly but not how I moved generally. Participation in a new sport put additional stress onto my body as I continued to use myself badly whilst attempting different or more complex techniques.

An added complication was that the more I used myself in this way, the worse my condition became, as my movement deteriorated through repetition of poorly executed moves. Each training session helped only to consolidate the habits that were at the route of the problem. In short I became more proficient at moving badly and was totally oblivious to the degradation until the pain began.

Through Alexander lessons I began to unlearn bad habits and eventually returned to running and started again. I began to appreciate my teacher as an expert fitness coach able to assess my performance and make changes at the most fundamental level.

For the last ten years I have continued to experiment with The Alexander Technique and fitness and found just how much can be achieved by first learning how to do less and not more. It has opened up a whole new perspective to how I approach my training and fulfil my role as a fitness coach by adding some much needed intelligence!

Contact Information

If you have any questions about what you have read here or would like to add your own comments please **email me**