

An Easy Exercise That Pays Big Dividends

Good posture may spare your child any number of ills; here's how he can achieve it

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AT A WEDDING recently, I watched a bridesmaid outshine even the bride. She was not pretty or spectacularly dressed, but she stood straight and trim and seemed to radiate a happy pride.

Looking about the church, I could see why she was so attractive. Many of the other women, especially those over 40, were slumped forward with their backs rounded into that familiar dowager's hump.

Poor posture is a pet peeve of mine. It's a bad and even dangerous habit. It not only looks ugly but can cause a number of serious physical problems. And yet I find it difficult to give away one of the most valuable things I possess—a simple exercise to improve posture.

When I recommend this exercise to one of the young boys or girls who come to me, the patient and his parents seldom follow through.

How serious is this problem? One doctor reports that bones, ligaments, and muscles may even change shape to accommodate themselves to the demands that faulty body mechanics make upon them. And no good is likely to come from this.

A six-year-old boy I know, who long had a serious posture problem, was in and out of doctors' offices for almost a year. He was subject to vomiting. His intestines were distended with gas. And in spite of a carefully restricted diet, sugar showed in his urine.

Finally this little fellow was taken to a hospital and placed in a cast. It raised his ribs and diaphragm and drew up his abdominal organs. After four weeks in the hospital (during which he wore the cast day and night) and two months at home (during which he wore the cast at night and a brace in the daytime), his young body was brought back to normal alignment and health.

This is a most extreme case. I cite it in a wish to illustrate, as dramatically as possible, the deleterious effects that bad body mechanics can produce. Actually many chronic diseases are found to have an association with bad posture. Less serious and more frequent disabilities are neuralgia, constipation, backache, and fatigue.

Fatigue probably is the most common complication, for when we

do not stand properly, we put pressure on the wrong planes. For instance, when our body weight rests on our upper thighs, extra muscle effort is constantly needed.

The better our posture, the greater our endurance will be. This is why athletic coaches put such importance on proper carriage.

Good posture is the initial position we take when we are about to dance. Our body tilts slightly forward. Every step is the start of a fall which we control.

Barring some physical disability, both bad posture and good posture are the result of habit. And it has been my experience that, when we train our bodies to stand properly, we do not depart from this posture.

This is why I urge my young patients to try my exercise for better posture. "Do it," I tell them, "as often as opportunity allows. Do it 10 times every day at least. Do it as you stand on the curb waiting for a traffic light to turn green, as you're changing classes in school, as you stand to sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' Get into the habit of standing correctly."

THIS IS WHY I am vexed by mothers who neither impress their children with the importance of this habit-forming exercise nor check to see that they do it.

All it requires is that boys and girls for a full minute:

1. Hold in the abdomen.
2. Contract the buttock muscles.
3. Stand at full height.
4. Hold in the chin.

When the abdomen is held in, abdominal muscles receive better support. When the buttocks are contracted, the pelvis is elevated so the bones of the legs articulate better with the feet.

When full height is attained, it is possible for every part of the body to fall into its natural position. This means bones, muscles, ligaments, and internal organs have every opportunity to function as they were meant to.

When the chin is pulled in, the bones of the neck are straightened. The dowager's hump is eliminated. The body is properly aligned.

By helping our children acquire the habit of good posture through this simple exercise, we serve them well. We contribute to their good appearance—and we give them the finest health insurance.



COVER:



Vivacious Ann-Margret is caught by John Engstead in this pretty blouson dress and jacket which are part of her spring ensemble. Patterns you can sew on page 8.

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