

A Posture You Can Breathe In

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Author's note: Each patient education article in this column details research documented in *Somatovisceral Aspects of Chiropractic: An Evidence-Based Approach*, co-edited by Marion Todres-Masarsky, DC.

More than most functions, breathing straddles the interface between the somatic and visceral aspects of human physiology. As doctors of chiropractic, we understand that the musculoskeletal system and the respiratory system are intimately related. However, this is not always readily apparent to our patients.

The following patient education article presents a simple technique for finding the "right" posture by taking advantage of the dual (somatic and visceral) nature of breathing. Please feel free to use it on your bulletin board, for lay lectures, and/or in your practice newsletter.

"What setting for my car seat will give me the best posture for driving? How should I adjust my office chair for the ideal working posture? Which way should I position my backpack for the least stressful posture while standing and walking?"

Our patients frequently ask these and other seemingly simple posture-related questions. Since posture involves all of the body's weight-bearing joints, most of the body's major muscle groups, and the nerve circuitry controlling these muscle groups, the answers to such questions can be quite complex. For your doctor of chiropractic to supply a technically complete answer to any one of these questions, they would have to put you through a series of in-depth lectures on human anatomy and physiology!

Fortunately, many of the postural joints, muscles, and nerve circuits also serve the function of breathing.¹ You can take advantage of this "anatomical multi-tasking" to find a shortcut to ideal posture.

In a standing or sitting position, go into an "obviously bad" posture: slump your shoulders, drop your head forward, and slouch down in your seat if you are sitting. Now, try to take a deep breath. If you are like most people, your breathing will feel constricted by your distorted posture.

Now, sit or stand "ramrod straight": stomach in, chest out, shoulders back, etc. With your body now resembling a suit of armor, try taking another deep breath. Again, if you are like most people, you will feel constricted.

Now, find a reasonably balanced, lengthened posture, without going to the extremes of distortion or

ramrod straightness. Try taking a deep breath. Better? Now, see if some minor adjustment of your head, shoulder or hip position makes it even easier to breathe. If you are wearing a backpack, sitting at your workstation, or driving your car, make the necessary adjustments according to your ease of breathing. When you find your personal ideal posture, it may not look like a classically "correct" posture, but it is correct for you at that moment. When you have difficulty finding your correct posture, you may be experiencing interference from a vertebral misalignment or restriction (subluxation). This would be a good indication to get a chiropractic checkup.

Much of your body's anatomical equipment straddles the boundary between muscle function and organ function; between the conscious and unconscious functions of our minds; between breathing and posture. You can make practical use of this fact with a simple rule: Your personal ideal posture at any given moment is the posture you can best breathe in.

References

1. Masarsky CS, Todres-Masarsky M. Breathing and the Vertebral Subluxation Complex. In: Masarsky CS, Todres-Masarsky M (editors). *Somatovisceral Aspects of Chiropractic: An Evidence-Based Approach*. Churchill Livingstone, New York, 2001.

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