

# Massage & Body Maintenance

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Member, Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals

## The Importance of Proper Posture

### Correct Alignment Leads to Better Health

Hope Bentley

Talk of good posture often generates images of women walking in a circle with books balanced on their heads or soldiers standing at attention. But good posture does not have to be rigid or ridiculous. In fact, far from ridiculous, it may be the key to good health.

According to Patrick Wroblewski, a Boulder, Colorado-based structural integration practitioner, "Good posture is a dynamic, working awareness of how gravity is coming down through the body." In other words, just as the body moves and changes throughout the day, so should posture.

Wroblewski explains that many people come in to his practice with complaints

misalignment, like standing with a hip cocked to one side. These common forms of less-than-perfect posture mean less-than-healthy consequences for the body.

### Does Posture Matter?

Ever feel low on energy? Get sick often? Experience headaches or digestive upset, like constipation or diarrhea? Feel less agile than you used to be? Your postural habits may be behind these symptoms.

Proper posture means the body is aligned so that all the muscles work as they were designed to. On the other hand, poor posture leads to inefficient

*"If your teeth are clenched and your fists are clenched, your lifespan is probably clenched."*

-Terri Guillemets

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Working in front of a computer often leads to poor posture. Learn how to counteract the effects.

of lower back pain, and stiff necks and shoulders, most of which have a direct correlation to poor posture. If a person sits hunched in front of a computer screen all day, it's likely the head hovers towards the screen, the lower back has collapsed and the tail bone is supporting the weight, and legs are crossed or splayed. Bad standing posture includes the same hunching or lateral

movement, causing the muscles to have to do extra work. For instance, if the head isn't resting correctly on top of the neck and spine but hovers over the chest instead, the muscles at the back of the neck have to remain contracted to hold the head up. The results? Circulation becomes hindered, and oxygen and

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nutrients have a hard time flowing through the body. Contracted muscles are less able to receive hydration and energy, and the tissue eventually becomes hard and fibrous. Eventually, muscles can pull bones out of alignment and cause serious problems and discomfort.

The bottom line is, poor posture can lead to muscular stress and fatigue, which can in turn lead to deficient circulation, compromised immunity, and poor lymph flow--which brings us back to low energy, frequent illness, headaches, digestive issues, and waning agility. So to answer our earlier question, yes, posture matters.

## Perfecting Posture

Correcting poor posture requires undoing the hardening, or fibrosis, of the muscles that have been habitually contracted, allowing them to relax and the bones to move back into place. Perhaps a simple concept, but not an easy task.

Wroblewski uses a combination of techniques to help correct posture: Swedish massage can help increase circulation and release chronically held areas. Deep tissue massage helps wake up the body and reverse some of the fibrosis in the tissue. And other bodywork techniques can further precipitate postural adjustments. He says, "Any kind of manipulation--craniosacral, acupressure--can cause an unwinding of tension and allow the body to release to the position in which it belongs."

Wroblewski also recommends movement education, an umbrella term that includes many types of bodywork, such as Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais Method, Hellerwork, and Trager Approach. Movement education advocates that one's body structure and movements can get stuck in habitual, unhealthy patterns. Movement education unwinds the patterns and teaches the body, as well as the mind, anew. This is done through a series of sessions where practitioners may use hands-on manipulation to teach the student different, more efficient ways to move, sit, stand, reach, bend, lift and walk. Ultimately, this balances the body and allows energy to move freely.

Movement education techniques may be

especially beneficial for people suffering from chronic difficulties, but also for anyone trying to achieve higher levels of physical and mental wellness.

According to Wroblewski, bodywork can induce a "neutral reprogramming," so that people can start from scratch and learn to recognize when good posture is breaking down. Then the necessary adjustments can be made.

## What's a Body To Do?

Desk jobs are notorious for wreaking havoc and causing postural impairments. Sitting for hours on end staring at a computer screen is likely one of the worst things you can do to your body. If you spend a lot of time sitting, make sure both feet are flat on the ground to give yourself a "tripod" of stability for the spine to rest on. Also, be sure to take frequent breaks, even if it just means walking to the window for a

moment, or getting a glass of water. And when standing, distribute weight evenly between both feet, and don't lock the knees or ankles.

Good posture takes practice, practice, practice and constant reminding. Wroblewski suggests leaving reminders in places where you will run into them throughout your day.

Old habits die hard, and this is true for muscular habits too. Be sure to schedule a series of massage treatments to help retrain the body. And talk to your practitioner about stretches and posture tips that can enhance your massage sessions. As you progress, you will notice less joint and muscle pain, fewer headaches, more energy, and possibly even stronger immunity and better digestion. Finally, you will develop a stronger awareness of your body and an increased sense of well being.



**Practice makes perfect! Good postural habits require repetition and practice, practice, practice.**

# Nature's Nutritional Wonder

## Cruciferous Vegetables

Cruciferous vegetables are powerful foods that can help prevent many forms of cancer, reduce existing cancer tumors, and aid in the prevention of heart disease. Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, arugula, kale, and Brussels sprouts all contain isothiocyanates--a group of chemicals that break down carcinogens in the body, helping to metabolize toxins. Studies show that people who eat two to three servings of cruciferous vegetables each week lower their risk of breast cancer, colon cancer, and lung cancer. A National Cancer Institute study found that eating three helpings of crucifers a week dropped prostate cancer risk by 50 percent. The powerful chemicals in these veggies also reduce homocysteine levels, a known precursor to heart disease.

Cruciferous vegetables are low in calories and high in fiber and the chromium found in these foods helps regulate blood sugar and insulin function, key factors in keeping diabetes at bay. Even with all the benefits that crucifers provide, many people refuse to

eat them because of their strong taste. But a little creativity can go a long way in making these wonderful foods palatable: try cream of broccoli soup, cauliflower au gratin, stuffed cabbage, or the recipe below--the possibilities are endless.

### BRUSSELS SPROUTS FOR THE MEAT-AND-POTATOES EATER

*1 pound fresh Brussels sprouts, washed, stems trimmed, and outer leaves removed*  
*1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil*  
*2 tablespoons unsalted butter*  
*3 tablespoons cider vinegar*  
*1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese*  
*Salt and pepper, to taste*

Thinly slice Brussels sprouts, either in a food processor fitted with a slicing blade, or by hand. Heat a heavy, nonstick skillet. Add olive oil and butter, swirling the pan so that the butter melts. Saute sliced Brussels sprouts for 5 minutes. Add cider vinegar and grated Parmesan, stirring briefly to incorporate. Add salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serves four--who will all be healthier for it!



Cruciferous veggies help ward off disease.

# Nuts Help Control Diabetes

## The Benefits of a Healthier Diet

If you're a diabetic, or are otherwise concerned about your glucose levels, a new study has some potentially life-saving news for you. Researchers have found that replacing carbohydrates with just two ounces of nuts on a daily basis significantly improved glycemic control and reduced LDL cholesterol for patients with type 2 diabetes.

The study was published in the August issue of *Diabetes Care* and features the work of David Jenkins, MD, PhD, DSc, who says that, "Nuts, including peanuts, can make a valuable contribution to the diabetic diet by displacing high glycemic index carbohydrates and replacing them with vegetable fats and vegetable proteins which have been shown in the long term to be associated with better

cardiovascular health and diabetes prevention."

### Why so good?

One of the qualities of nuts that the study gives as a potential cause of this benefit is that they are a source of mono- and polyunsaturated oils--fatty acids that are healthier than saturated fats. In addition, they report that the high amount of protein found in nuts helps reduce hunger by increasing the length of time that one feels full.

### Making the change

One thing to consider when seeking to implement this change in your diet is the increasing prevalence of peanut and other tree nut allergies. A 1999 study by

the National Institute of Health (NIH) estimated that approximately 1.1 percent of the population, or some 3 million Americans, are affected by this allergy, which can cause hives, throat tightness, wheezing, vomiting, and other serious side effects.

On the other hand, the NIH reports that over 18 million Americans have been diagnosed with diabetes and estimates that there are an additional 7 million who have not been diagnosed. If consuming two ounces of nuts a day can significantly improve aspects of this condition, which is associated with blindness, heart disease, kidney failure, limb amputation, stroke, and death, it would appear to be a smart move to make.

*A smile is a  
curve that sets  
everything  
straight.*

- Phyllis Diller

Take time to listen to your body - for a change. . . . .

The body is a marvelous creation and is forever trying to communicate with us, telling us way ahead that we are doing something that may later on cause a major problem.

For a change - take time to listen to your body....

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