

# Posture and the

Good posture makes a person look young and strong, while poor posture causes an individual to appear old and frail. Posture is vital to health and wellness, and the esthetician's working stance is impacted significantly by it when working on clients. If not corrected early in a career, these postural faults can lead to an aging appearance. Being informed and correcting these misalignments can protect against this professional hazard.

A great number of esthetic services entail the act of bending forward to administer to clients throughout the day. Estheticians sit, stand, walk, kneel and twist, turning their bodies in awkward positions to maneuver during manicures, pedicures, skin procedures, massage, waxing and a myriad of other tasks.

Electrolysis, in particular, is especially taxing on the body. Constant deviation from the proper body alignment may lead to several postural faults that can develop over time, including a forward head tilt, round shoulders, kyphosis (an abnormal curvature of the spine, resulting in a "dowager's hump"), lordosis (a forward curvature of the spine that produces a hollow in the back), sagging breasts and a protruding abdomen. It is not surprising that, after many years of working in the industry, an esthetician may develop poor posture without even realizing it. This constant stress placed on the neck, shoulders and lower back eventually can take a huge toll that results in severe discomfort and pain. A large number of electrologists have had to retire early from the profession due to back problems. This condition may be exacerbated by poor health habits, such as a sedentary lifestyle, drinking and smoking, and insufficient sleep.

## POSTURE AND WELLNESS

Posture plays a vital role in the daily activities of living, standing, walking, bending or sitting. Factors such as genetics and mood may affect postural alignment as well. For example, when a person feels tired, stressed or depressed, they tend to slouch forward. Conversely, when they are happy, they are more likely to stand in an erect fashion. Standing or sitting with upright posture encourages increased oxygen intake by the lungs, strengthens the postural muscles and even improves mood. Good posture also conveys an air of self-confidence and strength.

In today's health-conscious society, treating the body holistically is becoming essential, particularly because the esthetics profession now is being marketed as a wellness therapy. Estheticians perform face and body treatments on clients who expect to receive sound advice on nutrition and exercise. Although they are not nutritionists or fitness instructors themselves, these professionals must



# Esthetic Professional by pat lam

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possess comprehensive knowledge about how to achieve a strong and healthy body, which is equated with good posture.

Before embarking on any fitness regimen, a client's posture needs to be assessed and corrected so that effective breathing patterns can be utilized. Poor posture diminishes the effects of exercise, because the working muscles do not receive sufficient oxygen to metabolize energy, which leads to fatigue. It is the muscular system that supports the body, so it is possible to use corrective exercises to rectify postural faults. Physiologically, the spine is the major support system of the skeleton, and, together with the ligaments, tendons and skeletal muscles, it struggles constantly to support the body against the force of gravity. Numerous muscles are

attached to bone, which makes it possible to execute a variety of movements.

## THE PHYSIOLOGY OF MUSCLES

Muscles work in pairs, and several of them are involved in any particular movement. The muscles that actively contract are known as agonists, or prime movers, while those that hold the joints in place are called antagonists. Other small muscles that surround the joints are referred to as synergist muscles that control movement. For example, when the elbow is flexed, the biceps (agonists) contract and become shortened, while the triceps (antagonists) stretch. The muscles around the joints (synergists) work together with the ligaments to help stabilize the joints. Muscles that are used repetitively become tight and are overdeveloped, while unused muscles become overstretched and weakened, resulting in uneven joint movement that creates strain and ultimately leads to discomfort.

## POOR POSTURE AND AGING

Poor posture often is equated with the dowager's hump that commonly is seen in older people. Compounded by a sedentary lifestyle, poor body alignment is caused by weak

## STEPS TO ACHIEVING A HEALTHY BACK AND PERFECT POSTURE

1. Maintain a general level of physical fitness. Pilates and yoga are excellent forms of exercise that focus on achieving stronger posture and improved flexibility.
2. Shed excess weight, especially around the abdomen.
3. Change sitting/standing/working positions frequently in order to avoid placing undue strain on one particular pair of muscles or joints.
4. Wear comfortable shoes, and avoid wearing high heels for extended periods of time.
5. Perform strength and flexibility exercises designed to benefit the back at least three times per week.
6. Be aware of your posture at all times. Keep your shoulders aligned with your hip joints by holding your head erect and relaxing your shoulders. Hold your abdominal muscles tightly to position the pelvis in proper alignment with your relaxed—not locked—knees. With continued repetition of the preceding exercises, eventually this contraction will become internalized, and you will perform it automatically.

supportive muscles and postural faults. As an esthetician or wellness practitioner, it is necessary to set a walking example of the anti-aging services advocated by the industry by maintaining an upright posture. It is easy to become complacent and forget about public appearance. It is vital for them to project a positive image to their clients. Estheticians should appear friendly, cheerful, optimistic and brimming with confidence, as evidenced by healthy, glowing skin, accompanied by a trim, toned body with erect posture. Good posture communicates vitality and exerts a positive impact on others. This confident persona conveys credibility and tends to influence clients to pay greater attention when an esthetician introduces new products and services, leading to increased sales and revenue for their clinic or spa.

### THE IDEAL POSTURE

Correct posture helps to position the body for effective movement in all planes of motion. Conversely, poor posture places stress on the antigravity muscles and joints, leading to reduced efficiency of movement. With an ideal posture, energy expenditure is minimized to keep the body in a state of balance. Proper body alignment can be measured by using an imaginary plumb line of gravity. When viewed from the side, this line should pass through the vertex of the head, the earlobe, the shoulder and the hip joint, down to the arch of the foot.

Any deviation from this line will impede body alignment. For example, upper-body postural faults can be noted if the line falls behind the ear, instead of through the earlobe, indicating the forward head tilt postural fault that usually is accompanied by round shoulders. This can be remedied if tight muscles are overstretched, or weak muscles are tightened and strengthened. When agonist muscles are worked, the opposing antagonist muscles must be worked as well. When exercising with weights, increase the amounts progressively, in keeping with the development of your physical capabilities. It also is very important to follow a workout by stretching those muscles that have been exerted, in order to help avoid injury.

Balance is the key to a powerful posture.



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The following include some common postural faults, as well as corrective exercises designed to strengthen and restore the involved muscles.

**1. Forward head tilt.** If the head is out of alignment with the rest of the body, numerous other areas along the plumb line are likely to be affected. This position places stress on the neck muscles and the upper back as the head struggles to align itself to the lower spine. Often, this postural fault is found among tall, thin individuals (ectomorphs) or short, heavy body types (endomorphs). Many ectomorphs have a tendency to slouch forward, and, as a result,

they form round shoulders over a period of time. Furthermore, throughout the aging process, the skeleton begins to shrink and the postural fault becomes accentuated, creating a dowager's hump. To correct this deficiency, the back muscles, including the latissimus dorsi (the large triangular-shaped muscles on either side of the back that connect the spine with the arms), the rhomboids (the muscles that attach the scapula to the spine) and the trapezius muscles (the large muscles on each side of the upper back), must be tightened and strengthened in order to keep the shoulders balanced over the hips.

**Corrective exercise:** Stand with feet placed hip width apart, with toes pointing forward, then extend arms to the back and interlace fingers. Pull fingers downward and push hands backward to stretch the pectoralis muscles. This moves the head slightly backward to improve body alignment. Hold the position, release, inhale and repeat.

**2. Round back.** This is the most common postural deviation in our culture and frequently is observed among both endomorphs and ectomorphs. When the ear is out of alignment with the shoulder, the muscles of the upper shoulders contract and tighten. To compensate for this abnormality,

many people respond by lifting their chin. Eventually, this can result in a forward head tilt, accompanied by a round back with constant pressure at the base of the neck. The upper arms tend to turn inward toward the body, and the pectoralis muscles contract, while the trapezius muscles become weakened, manifesting in round shoulders. To correct this weak upper-body posture, the pectoralis muscles must be stretched, while the trapezius muscles need to be tightened.

*Corrective exercise:* While holding light weights, slowly bend forward with a flat back to a 45-degree angle with arms hanging straight down toward the floor and palms facing each other. Pull elbows laterally to the sides of the body, bending them as you go. Hold and slowly lower. This exercise not only helps to pull the neck backward to strengthen it, but also strengthens the rhomboid muscles that attach the scapula bones to the back of the spine and simultaneously stretches the pectoralis muscles.

**3. Protruding abdomen.** Among females, the abdominals are the weakest muscles—particularly after pregnancy, when they become overstretched and weakened. In abdominal protrusion, the opposing muscles are the erector muscles in the lower back that have become tightened by attempting to support the body in an upright position. The oblique muscles are the synergist, or supporting, muscles. In order to develop proper body alignment, all muscles on either side (antagonist, antagonist and synergist) must contract and stretch to their fullest capacity.

*Corrective exercise:* Partial abdominal crunches work the upper midsection. Place arms either at the sides of the body (the beginner's position), crossed over the front of the chest (intermediate), or with hands placed behind the head (advanced). While lying on your back, with feet placed flat on the floor and knees bent, perform abdominal curls slowly by lifting the chin and raising the shoulders gradually. Breathe out at the point of exertion, and inhale as you lower your body to the floor. Reverse curls work both the upper and lower abdominals, and are performed in the

same manner as noted previously, but with the ankles crossed and lifted at a 45–60-degree angle.

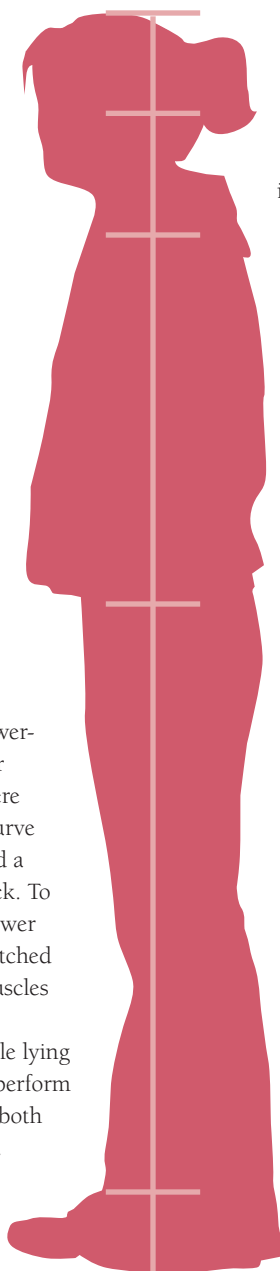
#### **4. Lordosis.**

Lower back pain is an extremely common problem, particularly among ectomorphs and those who are aging. The lower back muscles tighten as the result of an exaggerated inward (concave) curve of the lumbar area. Conversely, the abdominals become overstretched and weakened. This problem may be associated with an anterior pelvic tilt and shortened hip flexors. At times, both upper- and lower-body alignment may occur simultaneously, so that there is a pronounced convex curve of the upper shoulders and a marked concave lower back. To correct this posture, the lower back muscles must be stretched out and the abdominal muscles must be tightened.

*Corrective exercise:* While lying prone on your abdomen, perform back extensions by lifting both arms and legs off the floor. Stretch arms and thighs while lifting them. Repeat.

#### **5. Locked knees.**

Some individuals have a habit of standing with their knees in a locked position, thus contracting and shortening the hamstring muscles at the backs of their thighs and overstressing the quadriceps at the fronts. This can be observed easily from a side view position. With the powerful thigh muscles



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not being used to move the legs while walking, the hip rotators may be utilized instead, placing additional stress on the knees to absorb the shock of the aerobic impact. Commonly referred to as hyperextended knees, this postural fault usually is accompanied by pointed toes that tend to curve inward.

*Corrective exercise:* Stand with knees relaxed, while holding the upper body upright at all times. When walking, make sure to lead first with the heels, followed by the toes.

## **MAKING IMPROVEMENTS**

Obtaining good posture depends on an awareness of how your body appears, as well as the desire to correct misalignments. Ask someone to take a photo of you while you are sitting and standing, and analyze the results. If you want to have a healthy, pain-free back in your later years, it is imperative to maintain a strong postural alignment at all times.

Preventive measures include engaging in regular physical activity, doing strength training and following a nutritious eating plan. (See **Steps to Achieving a Healthy Back and Perfect Posture**, page 43.) All of these strategies can contribute to maximizing bone mass and preventing osteoporosis—a common age-related degenerative disease—as well as achieving a better overall quality of life. ■

*Editor's note:* To learn more about health and nutrition, refer to Pat Lam's book, *Nutrition: The Healthy Aging Solution* (Allured Publishing, 2004). For more information or to order a copy, call 630-653-2155, or log on to [www.allured.com/bookstore](http://www.allured.com/bookstore).