

# DOCTOR'S CORNER

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## FORWARD HEAD POSTURE

Maintaining a good posture does not only make us look taller and more attractive, it is also a part of maintaining good health. Good posture means your spinal bones are properly aligned and your joints, muscles and ligaments can work as nature intended. Good posture contributes to the proper functioning of the nervous system. Without good posture, your overall health can be compromised. The long-term effects of poor posture can affect bodily functions – such as digestion, elimination and breathing, as well as the functioning of the muscles and ligaments. A person who has poor posture may often be tired or unable to work efficiently or move properly.

One of the more common postural distortions seen in doctor's offices these days is Forward Head Posture or FHP. In my office, it is frequently a contributing factor of neck pain and stiffness patients seek relief for. In the past few decades, with the proliferation of computer workstations in most businesses and homes, FHP has fast become a common modern day affliction. Since we live in a forward facing world, the repetitive use of computers, TV, video games, trauma and even backpack carrying and most of all, driving, have forced the body to adapt to a forward head posture.

Think of your head as a bowling ball that weighs between 12 – 15 pounds. Ideally, your head should be positioned directly over your cervical (neck) spine and shoulders. If your head is even an inch forward of this normal position, the weight of your head effectively doubles the load your neck has to support. If you keep your head in this position for long periods, pain syndromes will eventually occur and can cause the above-mentioned symptoms, as well as upper back muscle spasms. Because the neck and shoulders have to carry this weight all day, spinal tissues are subject to significant loading for sustained periods of time. The spinal tissues can, over time, deform and undergo remodeling changes that could become permanent. When this happens it takes a much longer time to correct it than to initially prevent it. Postural distortions are very subtle at first and can become progressively worse over time if steps are not taken to change the course of FHP. Forward head posture has been shown to flatten the normal neck curve, resulting in disc compression, damage and early degenerative changes, or arthritis. This abnormal position is often linked to tension headaches that start at the back of the head and sweep over the top and front of the head. FHP can also cause tension to the TMJ (temporal-mandibular joint) or jaw joint leading to pain, headaches and bite problems. Some evidence exists that postural positions can affect the nerve tissue by altering blood flow to the spinal chord. People with uncorrected FHP can potentially suffer chronic or unpleasant conditions, such as pinched nerves and blood vessels, as seen in thoracic outlet syndrome.

FHP is fairly easy to detect. Patients are usually asked to look up at the ceiling, down at the floor, and then straight ahead. I then find the center of the shoulder and draw an imagery line up. It should pass right through the middle the ear where the hole is. If you were to continue this imagery line down through the rest of your body, the line should fall through the middle of your hips, through the middle of the knee and ankle.

In my office, determining FHP is fairly straightforward. If I suspect a postural component to a patient complaint, the first step is a thorough consultation and spinal examination along with x-rays (if needed) to identify all factors that may contribute to Forward Head Posture. Once identified, chiropractic adjustments and exercise/postural recommendations can be made. Most chiropractors will point out poor ergonomics and situations that predispose an individual to FHP, and give practical solutions.

### **OTHER SOLUTIONS:**

- 1) For office use and video game playing, place your computer monitor height so that the top third of the screen is 18" – 24" from your face. Be sure to support your lower back.
- 2) Every 20 – 24 minutes, sit up straight and pull the neck and head back over the shoulders. Hold for a count of 3 and do 15 – 20 reps. Alternatively, stand against a wall with a small pillow at your mid-back. Move your head back to touch the wall. Hold for a count of 3 and do 15 – 20 reps.
- 3) Always use a back/lumbar support pillow when sitting or driving. By supporting the low back, the head and neck will move over the shoulders.
- 4) At home, lay face down on the floor and extend your head and shoulders up while pinching your shoulder blades together. Hold for a count of 3 and do 15 – 20 reps.
- 5) Backpacks – maximum backpack weight should be 15% of your weight. Never wear backpacks over one shoulder. Always use a waist belt, and if available, a chest belt to neutralize the load. Without these belts, the head will move forward to compensate for the load. A new type of backpack with an air bladder has been shown to significantly reduce weight without a strap.

Monitoring good posture should be a lifetime commitment. With a little effort and awareness, you can be assured of a pain-free future doing things you love to do, rather than suffering from the damage and degeneration that FHP and poor posture can bring.

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Robert G. Silverman is a Doctor of Chiropractic, Certified Nutrition Specialist, Certified Clinical Nutritionist, has a Masters of Science in Human Nutrition, is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist, and is a Diplomate with the American Clinical Board of Nutrition. He has a full-time private practice in White Plains, where he is a practicing family and sports chiropractor and clinical nutritionist, while advocating the use of natural-based medicine. Dr. Silverman is one of the few practitioners in Westchester County who is certified in the highly acclaimed, medically patented, Active Release Non-Force Soft Tissue Technique, and also the cutting-edge Graston Technique, which is an advanced form of FDA-approved instrument-assisted soft tissue mobilization technique. For the past 3 years, he has been a member of the medical team of New York City's Triathlons and Marathons, Westchester Triathlons and local races. His Chiropractic associations include professional wrestling teams and local sports teams, where he has presented seminars on various topics including sports injuries and sports nutrition. In addition, Dr. Silverman has been chosen as the national spokesperson for the Vitamin Ester-C.

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