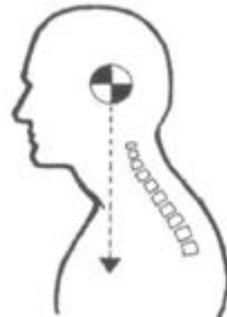
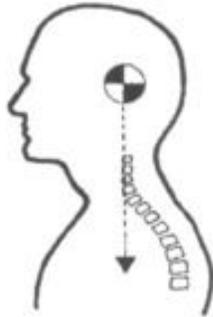


Body Posture, Our Health, and Introductory Exercises

Your body posture tells a story about how you have used your body, your hereditary predispositions, your emotional state, and what exercises might be good for you to perform. There are various types of body postures but the type this article is focused upon looks at the body from the side, noticing if your head sits too forward of your shoulders (forward head posture) and if your mid-back is too “rounded” (kyphotic).

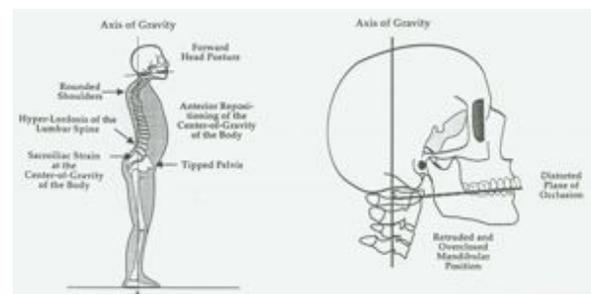
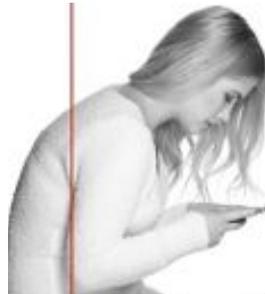


Forward Head Posture



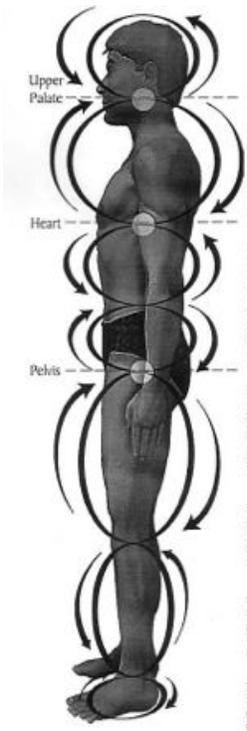
Increased Thoracic Kyphosis

While often thought that helping to reduce a forward head posture or increased thoracic kyphosis was an aesthetic issue we are now finding that this posture may have significant health related consequences. Recent research has found that an increased forward head posture or thoracic kyphosis is associated with a greater incidence of illnesses and a shortened life span.



Sometimes it is very difficult to hold your head over your shoulders and aside from this posture caused by habits such as having our head too close to a computer or bending over to look at our cell phones, we are finding that it can also relate to a compromised airway. Current scientific evidence is showing that jaw pain or tension can affect our breathing and airway, and one way to open our airway is to bring the head forward. So if your airway may be compromised, the importance of getting oxygen can make it difficult to keep your head over your shoulders.





Looking at our body from the side we can get an idea about how we need use our body when performing rehabilitative exercises and general life activities. With forward head posture and increased thoracic curves it is particularly important to be aware of the back of our head, the middle part of our chest, and the lower part of the front of our rib cage.

Instead of forcing our body to stand “straight” it is better to figure out which muscles are pulling it into positions that aren’t optimal, and learn how to be aware and relax them. The key concepts with posture awareness are:

1. Feeling as if there is a helium balloon attached to the back of your head and allow it to gently lift the back of your head while maintaining relaxation in the muscles under your chin.
2. Imagining another helium balloon is attached to the area in the middle of your chest and allow the upper part of your chest to rise while maintaining a gentle holding in your lower rib cage so it does not move forward.

Three Basic Exercises to Help



Standing Stretch

Finding a corner of a room or even in a door way, spread your arms apart and feel the middle and part of your chest moving forward creating a gentle stretch in the chest and front of the shoulders. Hold for a few minutes if you can and repeat.



Hands Behind Back Stretch

Grasp your hands behind your back and hold for a few minutes and repeat. If possible try to lift your hands a bit making sure to not bring your lower chest or head forward. Do this as often as possible and be gentle so you can hold the position for a while without any pain.



Shoulder Stretch

Finding a flat part of a wall hold your open hand against the wall and step forward with the leg on that same side. Gently hold this position for a few minutes and repeat, keeping the shoulder even with the one that isn’t being stretched.

Relaxing Passive Stretches

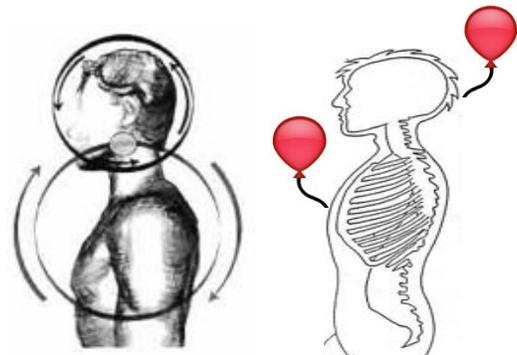


There many types of relaxing stretches we can use to reduce our thoracic kyphosis and reduce our forward head posture. One group of exercises can use a foam roller as a means to guide chest opening and support the goal of having better posture. Depending on your body's sensitivity you may want to use a foam roller that is soft or medium when placing the roller transversely across your back.

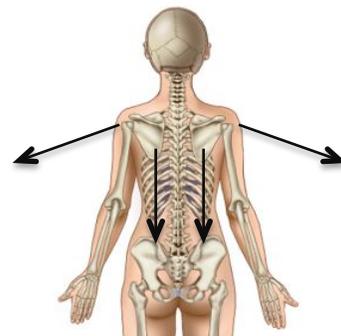
When reclining on the foam roller along the length of your spine it is key to focus on keeping your chin and forehead level and relaxing all parts of your spine into the roller, allowing your chest to open while still keeping your lower rib cage in contact with the roller. When reclining on the foam roller transversely find the area where your thoracic kyphosis is the greatest and place your back on the roller at that level. You can hold your head to keep your chin and forehead level but sometimes a pillow can be more comfortable and allows you to rest your arms. As your chest relaxes and opens make sure you do not let your lower chest to move forward and imagine that your lower rib cage is "lightly buttoned" so it does not splay forward.

General Awareness Concepts for Exercise and Moving Through Life

Awareness plays a large part of doing the exercises and moving around in your daily activities. It is important to focus on a concept of relaxing the muscles that are creating tension and pulling your head and shoulders forward. When we use muscles they contract so when we relax our body it allows our muscles to lengthen and widen. This expansiveness is our intension and goal.



As the mid-chest and back of our head gently lifts by surrendering to the imagined helium balloons, the lower part of our chest stays in place, "lightly buttoned." As we think about our back, our focus is that we allow our shoulder blades to float downward and imagine our shoulders widening as our muscles relax.



Relax – Open – Widen – Lengthen – Enjoy