



STRAIGHTEN UP!

The REAL dangers of poor posture.

By LARUE NOVICK

SIT UP STRAIGHT. DON'T SLOUCH. STAND TALL. Sage advice, really. Poor posture can do far more damage to your body than you might think. Aside from the obvious – hello, back pain – poor posture could result in acid reflux, heart and respiratory issues and could even knock some years off your life.

Are you sitting up straighter already? Good. Here is what's happening inside your body when you practice poor posture.

"Long-term slumping or leaning literally reforms the bones of the ribcage and spine, thus creating your own scoliosis," said fitness therapy and pain management guru Jill Miller,

who created Yoga Tune-Up. "The imbalanced rib cage and spinal vertebrae then shift the line of pull on the most central muscle of the human body: the respiratory diaphragm." The diaphragm, she explained, is directly linked to the stress response and the emotional centers in the brain.

So, in a nutshell, slouching leads to improper breathing and ultimately an overwhelming of the nervous system, which can lead to total body dysfunction. Most people, when suffering from stress, heart problems or digestion issues, don't consider posture to be a culprit. But be warned. "The effects of bad posture—and not dealing with it—are pain, surgery, limited mobility and a shortened life span," Miller said.

Q&A

Why do people practice poor posture on a regular basis? "Gravity is very hard to resist, and it takes awareness and strength to maintain an organized upright posture, especially if your job involves sitting at a desk all day or other repetitive tasks," pain management expert Jill Miller said.

What defines good posture? "Correct or proper posture is often described as if you were looking from the side, you would see your ear almost directly in line with the center of your shoulder, your hip, your knee and your ankle (when standing)," said chiropractor John Downes, D.C., executive director of the Sport Science Institute of Life University in Marietta, Georgia, and founder of the Performance for Life Method. "So if you drew a straight line down the side, each one of those points would be on the line."

What else can we do to practice good posture? "Get up and do some basic exercises," Downes suggested. "If you have no idea where to start, you can go to StraightenUpAmerica.org for some general exercises that make your body adapt to a new imposed demand, or you can go to ExercisesMedicine.org for another resource." 