May is Correct Posture Month
Tools from the Unified VCA to Help You Celebrate & Educate

Celebrate Wellness!

May is National Correct Posture Month -- and the perfect time to pull out your posture-related patient fact sheet and audio clip from the Unified VCA’s “Celebrate Wellness!” library. The materials are free for Unified VCA members to use as a hand out with patients in your office, on your web site, linked in a patient newsletter, and more.

The following is extracted from the “Celebrate Wellness!” patient fact sheet entitled “Posture: Mom Was Right!”

When folded up in the womb, we’re shaped like the letter “C.” This is the “primary curve.” Then we are born, and we develop secondary curves that arch in the other direction. These gentle curves occur in the neck (cervical spine) and low back (lumbar spine), and they round out the normal curves present in healthy, young spines. As time marches on, with gravity, muscular wasting, and spinal degeneration taking their toll, many of us will begin reverting back to the primary curve. In other words, we start “hunching” forward, looking more and more like so many grandparents, and less and less like the vibrant, youthful people we once were.

Gravity and bad habits are the two primary culprits in most “kyphotic” (hunched over) senior postures. Gravity is non-negotiable, so that leaves us with what we CAN control: Our muscles, our habits, and our choices. Being overweight puts stresses on the spine, knees, hips, and feet. If you’re carrying a few -- or more than a few -- extra pounds, consider making some changes towards a healthy balanced diet and an exercise program that fits your body, your personality, and your time constraints. Your doctor of chiropractic may have some great tips, if you’ve got a willing ear. If your weight-gain is because of chiropractic may have some great tips, if you’ve got a willing ear.

Many of us experience our postural stresses in a chair. Whether you drive a truck for a living, spend time hunched over in front of the computer, read a lot, or enjoy knitting or quilting, so many of life’s work and leisure activities involve sitting and forward (kyphotic) postures. It’s no wonder that we end up bent forward, if we train our bodies to do just that! Over time, spinal and other ligaments (which connect bones to bones) can stretch and undergo what is known as plastic deformation. Elastic deformation is when a tissue stretches and goes back to its original length. Plastic deformation is more like what happens when you stretch out a container due to prolonged stress -- it permanently reshapes and deforms. The challenge is for us to allow tissues to recover from the daily stresses of life, including sitting. Take frequent breaks from sitting; and consider rotating your work or leisure activities, if that’s an option for you.

Mirror image exercises are precisely what you might think they are: taking the postural “distortion,” and practicing its opposite. If your head tends to drift in front of your shoulders, practice “retracting” your head to counter that drift. If your pelvis tends to tip forward, learn to activate the muscles that counter that rotation. The challenge is to identify your particular patterns or distortions, and to overcome them -- safely. Doctors of chiropractic are trained in the function of the nervous system, which is the master system that controls both conscious and unconscious postural and movement patterns. In addition, your chiropractor is also trained in the relationships of the bones, muscles, ligaments, and tendons of your entire body -- with a special emphasis on the spine and related structures. Jumping into an exercise or stretching program is not recommended; rather, your doctor of chiropractic can help identify tight areas that need to be stretched, and weak or inhibited areas that need to be strengthened (and NOT stretched). Your chiropractor is also likely to adjust or manipulate related spinal, pelvic, and/or extremity joints that may be physically restricting your function and inhibiting normal patterns. You can “do it yourself” . . . or you can “do it right” -- with a little help from a trained professional.

For the full text, in pdf or Word, as well as the corresponding audio clip, visit the Unified VCA’s web site.

Create a Campaign & Show People How to Take Their Annual Posture Picture

By Steven Weiniger, DC

From text-neck to the computer slump, people know their posture is a problem. It’s up to you to help them do something about it and create an action plan towards improvement that includes regular chiropractic care. A Posture Month campaign is a great way to build awareness with education and annual posture pictures. Plus, engaged patients will often share their awareness by taking pictures of their friends’ posture, building your authority as the Posture Expert.
The first step in improving posture is seeing and benchmarking what someone's posture looks like. A camera and a regular background create digital documentation so you can make an objective assessment. Hold the camera level with the ground and photograph the subject from the front, back and side. (NOTE: A posture picture is protected health information under HIPAA, so keep pictures digitally secure with a dedicated camera or just download pictures to their EHR).

Grids are great for more precise measurement, but a standard six panel door or anything showing a vertical reference works as a benchmark to compare future images. Have them stand a few inches from the wall or door with what feels like "standing tall good posture." If they stand rigidly, at attention, tell them to relax (and notice how many people are actually a bit uncertain of what standing tall actually feels like).

People are usually amazed to see their first Posture Picture, which helps them take the first step in becoming Posture Conscious. This awareness and the intentionality of taking a posture picture is the key to teaching patients to take pictures of others. When you review the clinical correlation of their posture and problem, suggest they can take a similar photo of others. Having them download a free posture assessment app (whether or not it's the one you use) can be helpful to encourage them to do so, but is not necessary to engage patients to take pictures of those they care about.

A cell phone camera or tablet is an essential tool for any neuro-musculo-skeletal professional. Back pain isn’t going away, Boomers are getting older, and posture is an acknowledged marker of general health. It’s not just kids with backpacks or cane-carrying seniors – studies show poor posture is a major cause of back and neck pain for all ages, and over time often contributes to digestive and cardio-pulmonary problems. The good news: there are easy things people can do to strengthen posture, including care to restore spinal health with an adjustment.

Repositioning the pain patient towards an awareness of their postural and motion deficits provides a logical and intuitively true bio-mechanical link between perceived pain and observable motion dysfunction. Restoring lost segmental motion is most agreed upon benefits of an adjustment, and often correlates with pain relief.

Chiropractors can then empower patients for pain management, rehab and wellness as well as align with the culturally and scientifically perceived value of strengthening core stabilizing muscles by adding posture, balance and alignment exercises to their protocols. In addition to training healthy joints to move in full-range symmetry, strengthening posture can have potential positive effects on psychological and/or emotional issues by improving posture and body consciousness. Posture pictures taken during an initial exam set the stage to build posture awareness and support the benefits of care when, after treatment, patients see tangible posture improvements.

A posture practice can target the opportunity today by building real relationships, regardless of insurance, to help people with the problem they present with, and then build value. The patient's desire to move well, optimize health and avoid a recurrence of their initial complaint becomes the center of a practice model with three elements: Posture Consciousness, Concepts and Control. In other words, build a cycle: connect their problem with posture, create awareness with a digital posture picture and then empower them with StrongPosture® exercises. Be aware of the benefits of standing taller and moving well.

**Dr. Weiniger literally wrote the book on improving posture, Stand Taller ~ Live Longer: An Anti-Aging Strategy, and is managing partner of BodyZone and PosturePractice.com. He has trained thousands of DCs to help their patients with the StrongPosture® exercise protocols and free PostureZone iPhone app and online referral directories. His posture work has been featured in mainstream media including ABC, FOX News, Oprah's Oxygen network, Prevention, and Bottom Line.**


**Straighten Up America!**

Straightenupamerica.org is a public service website maintained in collaboration with the Congress of Chiropractic State Associations (of which the Unified VCA is a member) and Life University. For a variety of materials including articles, brochures, patient hand-outs, PowerPoint presentations, and tips on how to use them, visit http://www.straightenupamerica.org/.

**VCAdoctalk**

VCAdoctalk, the email discussion group for Unified VCA Members, is a great place to exchange ideas for Correct Posture Month and so much more. Tap into your colleagues’ creativity and expertise -- and share your own!