“Want to have good posture,” is a request I get from many of my clients. One client, Glen, was a magician who wanted to improve his posture. He said his posture looked menacing to people and he wanted to appear more friendly to his audience. I asked him why he thought he appeared menacing. He said that because of his nearsightedness, he frowned a lot and his hunched shoulders added to this sinister impression.

I asked him to walk around my office. Glen kicked his heels out in front of him when he walked and pushed himself forward, rolling onto the balls of his feet in a defiant manner. I couldn’t help but get the impression of a little boy when I looked at him. He appeared to be carrying some heavy weight on his back. I commented, “Gee Glen, it almost looks like you are carrying a backpack or something.”

He stopped in his tracks and said, “You know, my parents made me walk around the block with heavy rocks in my backpack to get in shape for Boy Scouts. I just hated it.” He went on to say how humiliating this was for him. The pack was too big for him and was quite painful to his shoulders. I could only imagine the physical and emotional pain he must have struggled with during that time in his life of being forced to do something he hated.

However, this was 10 to 15 years later, and he was still walking as if carrying this heavy backpack. I wondered what would give Glen the experience of walking without this imaginary weight? I tried a number of conventional lessons based on the Feldenkrais Method. One day, Glen came in carrying a straightjacket that he used in his magic show routines for demonstrating escaping in less than two minutes. He asked me if we could do a lesson to help him improve his timing.

I agreed with Glen that the public would not think I could get one of these!” He asked him. “Oh, Annie,” he said, “I don’t think that would be a good idea, you might scare off clients.” “But look how great your posture is now,” I remarked. “This is a fabulous tool!”

I had Glen walk, and he was so much looser, lighter and more confident. I told him how delighted I was with his straightjacket and how effective this jacket would be with other clients. “Do you think I could get one of these?”

The jacket was a wonderful tool to show where he was free to move and where he was stuck. After 40 minutes of exploration, Glen said, “Do you think I could get out of this now?” He looked a little concerned and said, “I’m starting to get the creeps being in here so long.”

“Of course,” I said, and he was out of the jacket in a minute. Glen’s shoulders were very free and supple. I was so impressed with the lesson he had given himself with just a few little directions and constraints from me.

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I agreed with Glen that the public would not understand me using a straightjacket with clients, but I couldn’t resist trying on his jacket and exploring a few of the movements we did together.

The improvement of Glen’s posture was not about him learning to have a new fixed position of “better posture,” but more importantly, his learning to escape from fixation. He was no longer physically tied to the backpack his parents had strapped on him. Not only could he learn to quickly escape from this fixed position of posture, but he could escape in many different ways.

Good posture is not the perfect fixed position, but the ability to move in any direction. One might notice Houdini himself had great posture. —by Annie Thoe, GCFP

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Many people have the idea that the pelvis should be “vertical” to have proper posture for sitting. This means that the sacrum, or the back of the pelvis, is at roughly a ninety-degree angle to a flat chair seat, with the “bowl” of the pelvis neither tipping forward nor backward. There are ways to use our pelvis more effectively when sitting, so that we can stay comfortable for longer periods of time, and for moving while sitting, in activities such as computing, driving, visiting with friends, reading, writing, and eating, to name just a few. The short lesson in this article will begin with a vertical pelvis, and then explore another alternative. This experiment should take about ten minutes or less. If you start to get tired or sore, of course, stop and rest immediately.

As a reference point in this personal experiment, consider that the bones under each side of the base of your pelvis are like deep rockers on a rocking chair—they allow you to rock forward and back, as well as to shift side to side, by lifting one rocker up away from the supporting surface. Slide one hand under each side of your pelvis until you can feel the rocker-like bone with your fingertips. Then see if you can more clearly sense the rockers without your hands underneath you.

First, move forward toward the front edge of a fairly firm chair, so that you are sitting on the front third of the chair seat, with your feet comfortably on the ground and your pelvis vertical. To find the vertical, rock gently forward and back making the movements smaller until you feel you are “in the middle,” with your pelvis in a position that you sense as vertical. Stay there and notice how your back feels. Is there a bit of tension somewhere? Imagine putting a sticker on that part (or parts), so that you can check on it later.

Now, place the palm of one or both hands on your belly, and rock your pelvis forward slightly, so that your belly pushes your hands forward in space, toward being over the front edge of the chair. Allow your belly to soften and your breathing to be easy. This is not about inflating or sticking your belly out, rather you are rocking your pelvis forward slightly and allowing your belly to soften. Your pubic bone (the very center of the front of your pelvis, the bony part just below your belly) will move forward and down slightly, toward the chair. Practice this movement a few times, pausing when you get there, so that you get used to this feeling. Now, you are in a new configuration, slightly forward of vertical. How does your back feel now?

Check back to the spot(s) where you placed the imaginary sticker(s). Is there less tension than before? If so, it is likely that you have found more support from the natural curve of your lower back, or lumbar spine. Notice that you can still allow your belly to move slightly as you breath and your pelvis to shift, without destroying the feeling of ease and support. Your lumbar spine is curved naturally in this direction and with practice, you can learn to recognize the feeling of support that your spine affords you in this configuration. A “forced vertical” can interfere with your ability to sense and use your natural structural support, and is also unnecessarily demanding on the postural muscles of your trunk.

Sometimes at this point in the experiment, people report, “My lower back feels better, but now I’m tense up higher.” It is possible that even with more comfort in your lower back, you may feel some increase in the tension in your ribs, or middle or upper back. The reason for this is that the spine is one system, all parts relating to each other. When you change the way you use your lower back, the other parts must also learn to change harmoniously.

(Cont. on page 3)
Structurally, this is about balancing your head over your pelvis. Refining the relationship through your trunk—notice what happens to your trunk when you rock your pelvis slightly forward. Do you tip like a leaning tower? If you can, soften your waistline and allow your pelvis to roll forward without bringing your shoulders and head forward in space. Can you feel your chest softening? See if you can resist the urge to stiffen and lift your upper chest. Notice if you can relax any part of yourself a bit more, perhaps your jaw. You may notice that your back has the feeling of getting slightly taller when you rock forward. That is okay, but don’t exaggerate it or hold your breath. For this movement, see if you can leave your shoulders and head roughly over the same spot on the chair as you rock your pelvis forward, rather than tipping them forward.

The next step in this process might be to explore Awareness Through Movement® group lessons or Functional Integration® sessions which will help you to soften your sternum, (or your jaw) and then integrate that feeling into your new understanding of sitting. If this personal experiment is interesting to you, consider scheduling a lesson to further customize this improvement in sitting with your favorite Feldenkrais® practitioner. They are trained in helping you to discover the balance of your spine, the dynamic balance of your head and pelvis and how wonderful you can feel in sitting (among other things) when the new patterns become automatic.

Sitting is much more than sitting still. A “mobile seat,” (or an adaptable way of sitting comfortably) is one that can move with you in any number of seated tasks. Enjoy revisiting these movements as often as you wish during all your activities.

—by Jean Elvin, GCFP
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Growing Taller

The young woman, in my office for the first time, spoke to me about her back pain. She chronically slouched, and was concerned about her posture and its effect on her back.

I had her lie on her back, and began to gently explore the movements of her pelvis. Then, I lifted her head and studied how movements of her head, sternum, collarbones, and ribs related. Finally I returned to her pelvis and began gently pushing through the pelvis to the head, creating springiness in the spine. When I was finished, a small movement in the pelvis moved through the spine to affect the head.

When she stood up, her back pain was gone and her posture had dramatically changed. Her head was carried high and she looked at least an inch taller. I directed her to look at herself in a mirror and observe the change.

She agreed that there was a dramatic change, and then inquired, “When are we going to start working on posture?”

“We already have!” I said.

I explained to her that in Feldenkrais Method lessons we do not work on posture by admonishing our students to “stand up straight.” Instead, we help them to feel the skeleton in such a way that it becomes natural and more comfortable to sit and stand in a way that uses the spine more efficiently. The brain, beneath the level of conscious awareness, re-organizes the body for more efficient posture and movement.

Isn’t this more pleasurable than “Shoulders back! Chin down!” I asked? Somewhat startled by this new information, she agreed that it indeed was more pleasurable.

—by Ann Harman, GCFP
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**Better Movement, Better Posture**

“Good posture” is usually believed to entail standing up straight and strengthening some critical muscles to maintain that straightness. (The muscles most often seen as being in need of strengthening are the abdominals and the back of the shoulder muscles.) If you have ever tried to achieve better posture through such means, you probably realized that it is futile, and that in fact even if you can manage to “think” about standing or sitting straight, you forget the minute you go to do something else.

So, should you simply give up on “good posture,” succumb to your slouching, let your shoulders droop and let your neck pull and ache? Is it all just inevitable aging?

I suggest you look at the photos below. The man is 75 years old and has had each of his hips replaced in the previous three years. Compare his posture on the left to his posture on the right. Before taking each photo I had asked GB to point up and to the right. Can you see that in the “before” picture he could not stand properly on his right leg, that when he tried to reach, his chest slumped and his neck got short and bunched up in the back? He looks more ready to fall or sit, than to point upward!

In the photo on the right, GB can easily stand on his right leg, his chest is upright, his neck is long and his head is balanced nicely on top of his spine and legs. Reaching and pointing are easy and he looks much younger.

These are “before” and “after” pictures of GB who received seven **Functional Integration** lessons over a period of 11 days. **The improved posture was a by-product of improving GB’s movement.** GB reported that he could walk more easily and further (he gave up his cane because the pain in his left hip diminished significantly), he found himself more agile in putting on his socks, and his neck felt significantly freer when he was driving. And the postural changes that you see here, he does not have to think about and maintain consciously. Now that is dynamic and usable posture!

—by Olena Nitefor, GFCP
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(Olena’s client GB, “before” photo on left, “after” photo on right.)