

Article: GOOD POSTURE - THE BACKBONE OF GOOD HEALTH
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Prepared by: writer: CATHERINE NICOL interview with: JUDITH ANNE GOULD

"Small children have beautiful posture. Then it all goes wrong," says Judith Anne Gould of Hong Kong's Pilates and body work studio Posture Plus. "School, a more sedentary lifestyle, less running around outside, heavy bags, computers... I see the changes."

As someone who has observed and corrected posture in Hong Kong for over ten years, Gould is perfectly placed to witness the trend of posture problems creating short and long term physical dysfunction. As adults it is painfully clear to most of us chained to our desks, that a repetitive action, or simply inaction, is detrimental to our physical wellbeing. But that this modern lifestyle phenomenon is affecting our children is an even greater proof, if we needed it, that it is a serious trend.

Good, or natural posture is absolutely fundamental. "Good posture is a backbone for good movement," she explains. "If you begin a movement in a bad posture, it is very difficult to move in an efficient and effective manner. This in turn will lead to compensations, altering forces on the joints, straining the muscles and further reinforcing bad posture and poor movement habits. With time and repetition these changes become fixed."

While children as young as nine years old have started coming to see Gould, the majority of her clients are women, generally more aware of their physical shortcomings than men. They are particularly vulnerable when they are pregnant with additional weight, ligamentous and muscle changes, combined with stress and lack of sleep.

Previously, men were dragged in by their wives, or booked sessions once they had a serious pathological problem due to overtraining or an injury. "Twelve, thirteen years ago men had no clue," she observes. "They struggled to understand both the importance of the deep stabilizing muscles and how effective such gentle exercise could be. They were more used to sweating and making their muscles burn. But now I am seeing them more willing to try a form of exercise previously seen as only for women."

The initial Pilates session takes the shape of a subjective assessment, where she asks about lifestyle and activities, followed by an objective assessment where she assesses the posture, bony alignment, muscle tone and range of movement. Photos and even video can help her pinpoint which muscles are lengthened or tightened, which are weak and which are strong, and which are opting out together.



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It is not enough to spend one or two hours a week repairing the damage done over long work days. She encourages people to check out the government websites regarding ideal posture at work and make some simple adjustments themselves.

Occasionally an ergonomic evaluation is required, involving visiting a client at their office and taking photos of the desk and their posture as they sit and work.

"People are all making the same mistakes," she says. "Often they need to change the height of the chair, the desk, the monitor. Perhaps there is too much on the desk. Where are the keyboards and mouse? Are you actually using your chair?" At home too, when travelling, during sports, it is important to be aware of your posture.

Self-detection isn't really an option, as it's difficult to work out exactly where you're going wrong, even when symptoms point the way. "It's complicated," she warns. "It's very difficult to get the brain muscle connection and make it work correctly every time. We are training a good habit movement pattern, and eventually it must happen without you thinking about it. But with self detection, you need to know which muscle to correct and which one first."

Hong Kong is way behind more enlightened countries, like Australia, with the kind of knowledge, awareness and appliances available. "Maybe the next generation will be better," Gould says hopefully. "Younger adults are coming in; they're getting smarter and looking after themselves better. They're realizing it's essential to invest in your health." www.posture-plus.com

"It takes 300 repetitions of a bad movement pattern to become fixed; It takes 3,000 repetitions of the correct movement pattern to correct it" - PROFESSOR VLADIMIR JANDA, THE LATE FATHER OF CZECH REHABILITATION

Classic Problems:

- For women - neck, upper body, shoulders, as well as the knee, hip and lower back.
- For men - lower back, neck, knee and hip.

For the desk bound:

- Stretch every 20 to 30 minutes.
- Get up frequently to fetch some water and move around.
- Be aware of how you are sitting. Be dynamic and change your position often to work your muscles: move your ankles, tighten your legs - behave as if you were on a plane.
- Enlist the support of a 'posture buddy' to point out when you're in a bad position.
- Be aware of what you are carrying to and from work every day - go through your briefcase and handbag and get rid of anything that isn't essential.

Sports:

- Include cross training into your sports routine, so that you are using different muscles in different ways.
- Swimming brings different movement patterns with resistance and assistance.
- Pilates is hugely beneficial.
- Yoga can be too, as long as you have a good teacher.
- Everyone's different so find your own way to relax.

Helpful modalities

- Body massage and reflexology are both beneficial