



Forward Head Posture (FHP)

Ubiquitous

Definition: existing or being everywhere, constantly encountered

Synonyms: frequent, commonplace

Forward head posture (FHP) is ubiquitous! It robs many people of good health and can be the difference between losing and winning in life and sports.

As we begin the school and work season the demands of prolonged sitting further aggravate this postural deficit

We all know people who exhibit this exaggerated forward head posture. It is not only harmful to your health but can make you less attractive physically and show to the world a less confident depressed persona. Watching TV the other night it was interesting how a character was made to look weak and unattractive by showing them side profile with a slumped forward head posture.

Causes

FHP can be the result of trauma such as whiplash in a motor vehicle accident, an end stage of an arthritic condition known as Ankylosing Spondylitis, or from a compression fracture in the upper back vertebrae creating a hump in the upper back (Dowagers Hump).These conditions however account for only a small portion of this posture occurring. It instead is more commonly a result of the cumulative effects of our postural habits. As the saying goes “ First we create our habits and then they create us”

The way we sit while at work , driving the car or in front of the computer or TV is often slumped with the head translated forward. Sports can exacerbate this situation with over development of the muscles in the front of the body and a weakness in the upper back muscles.

Biomechanics

The head weighs 10 pounds and is shifted forward. This straightens the spine as the body moves to counterbalance. Muscles in the upper back and the base of the skull begin to contract. This results in compression to the front of the vertebrae compressing the disc, which starts a degenerative change to the disc and vertebrae. This also ultimately stresses the nervous system.

Symptoms

This forward head posture results in compensation and a chain reaction that affects all areas of the body and your overall health picture. Patients present to the clinic with neck, upper and lower back pain, jaw pain, headaches, fatigue, stress, difficulty sleeping, lowered immune function and depression as a consequence of poor posture.

Diagnosis

You can use a low- tech postural check to screen for this condition. Have your friend or family member stand to the side. The center of their ear should line up directly over the center of the shoulder. A more sophisticated method which we use at spinal screenings is to do the same thing with a digital picture, load it into the computer and then draw a line to measure head position. The most accurate assessment however is when we take a picture of the skull and neck to measure specifically how the head lines up over the cervical curve as well as measure the degrees of cervical curve. This should be 45 degrees but is often less than zero.

Treatment

Time and time again at the clinic we have been able to help people restore the cervical curve to normal and to reposition the head properly over the spine. This is done over a period of time with chiropractic adjustments, rehabilitative exercises with glasses, and therapeutic exercises to strengthen specific muscles and stretching of the ligaments by lying over top of a neck bolster.