

## Postural Strain

One individual may experience his losing fight with gravity as a sharp pain in the back, another as the unflattering contour of his body, another as constant fatigue, and yet another as an unrelenting threatening environment. Those over forty may call it old age; yet all these signals may be pointing to a single problem so prominent in their own structures and the structures of others that it has been ignored; they are off-balance; they are at war with gravity.

— Dr. Ida P. Rolf

### THE HEAD-FORWARD POSTURE

The Head-Forward posture has been seen as elegant and glamorous since the days of Nefertiti, at least in women. Strangely, it is never as attractive in men, who are labeled as “mouth breathers” and “knuckle-draggers” when muscle strain begins to take its toll.

In men, what *is* admired is a “military” or “regal” bearing often developed by necessity. The importance of good body mechanics becomes painfully clear when wearing a heavy crown, a 5-pound medieval helm, or heavy equipment on a long march. Attempting to support weight with muscle rather than bone is a terrible strain.

And yet, the ramrod-straight military posture is more form than function, more for display than actual application. You will see it at Buckingham Palace and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. You won't see it in war zones where the goal is to be low and small, to be less of a target, possibly while heavily loaded. WWII infantryman (such as Bill Mauldin's ever-weary riflemen, Willy and Joe), carried about 80 pounds of equipment. Today the load averages 100 pounds or more.

“Depending on the soldier's job,” notes Army veteran Chuck Gordon, “it may run as high as 200 pounds. The average load for an infantry rifleman includes up to 60 pounds of body armor, a 3-4 lb Kevlar helmet (K-pot), primary weapon and ammo that can range from 5-6 pounds up to 15-20 pounds for a machine gunner. A mortar troop



**Figure 100.** THE ELEGANT HEAD-FORWARD POSTURE

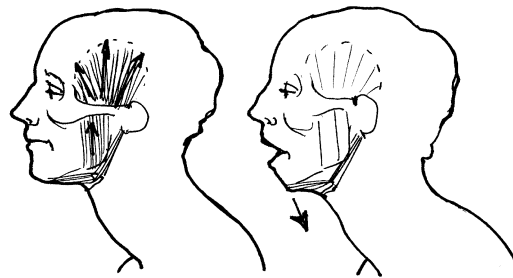
may carry an additional 15-20 pounds of mortar gear and ammo. Add rucksack, food, water, and personal items, and the foot soldier may be carrying anywhere from 30-105 per cent of his or her body weight into combat.

In combat zones, troops are on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, catching sleep when they can. Even in "rear" areas, troops will likely be required to wear body armor and carry primary weapons round the clock, working 12-16 hours a day, 7 days a week."

And so, members of the military are fighting a war on two fronts: with hostile forces and with their own equipment and enormous physical wear and tear. Overt damage includes traumatic brain injury (TBI) and amputations from explosions. Muscular and structural damage is more insidious. Many vets see civilian physicians who have no military experience of their own, no concept of what combatants have been through, and no idea why they might have terrible back pain and headaches.

Monsters and devils are typically portrayed with Head-Forward posture. Perhaps they snarl and behave so badly because they *hurt*. The Head-Forward posture strains muscles of back and neck. It also strains jaw muscles (Figure 101).

The more forward the head, the greater the pull to open the jaw. Attempting to keep the jaw closed keeps jaw-closing muscles under constant strain. These include MASSETER, TEMPORALIS, and PTERYGIDS, all involved in TMJD. All can cause brutal pain on their own, and all can trigger the trigeminal alarm system so heavily involved in migraine.

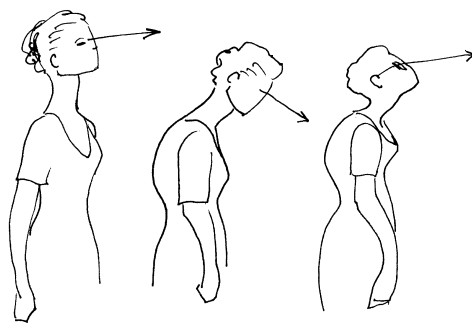


**Figure 101.** HEAD-FORWARD MUSCLE STRAINS

The Head-Forward posture also shortens chest muscles, rotating shoulders and arms (and knuckles) forward, impeding proper breathing and reducing oxygen supply.

It also deforms the neck. Ideally, the weight of the head rests on the neck bones which are separated by discs that act like springs. The further the head moves forward, the harder muscles must strain to keep it from falling down. Stress on bony attachments produces bone spurs. Aging bones may even develop stress fractures and remodel into the classic dowager's hump which is not at all elegant. Other problems arise.

When the neck tilts forward, face and eyes are tilted down. To see forward, head and chin must tilt up (Figure 102). This is the job of the SUBOCCIPITAL muscles. One of these (RECTUS CAPITIS SUPERIOR MINOR) connects directly to the dura of the brain and spinal cord. Strain on the dura strains its complex network of nerves and fascia and blood vessels. The result may be ferocious head pain and migraine of "mysterious" origin.



**Figure 102.** HEAD-FORWARD POSTURE AND SUBOCCIPITALS

Another problem is the straight neck that has lost its curve (also known as “Military Neck”; see page 243). A normal curve acts as a spring. Discs and vertebrae compress and rebound vertically and obliquely forward. In a straight neck, they are vertically compressed with every step, which can lead to disc narrowing and stress fractures.

Head-Forward posture and abnormal spinal curves are strongly associated with TMJD which is also associated with bad bite, but you can change your bite simply by changing your posture.

While standing up straight, ears over ankles (have a friend help you with this),

1. Relax your jaw completely then tap your teeth together. Note position.
2. Move your head strongly forward (into a classic “mouth-breather” pose) and notice how your bite changes.