

You Can Observe A Lot Just By Watching

By Lou Lombardo, LMT, NCTMB

Did you ever observe people's posture as they walk by you?

Whether you're in the grocery store, or in the airport, or at a festive event, you'd be surprised at the different kinds of posture you will see as people go about their daily routine.

As the venerable philosopher, Yogi Berra, so wisely stated, "You can observe a lot by watching"

I had the occasion to do just that at the Mt. Morris Italian Festival this past weekend as people strolled by our tent.

We were selling some of my favorite Italian sandwiches that were prepared using my "ancient Italian secrets".

While we were there I saw a lot of people walk by whose heads were flexed forward. This condition is known as "forward head posture". It is commonly caused by poor postural habits or activities like reading or watching a computer that require the head to be in flexion for long periods of time.

Let's face it, folks. We are a society in flex! The head is a heavy weight supported on a small base- the 1st cervical vertebrae known as the atlas. Many of our everyday activities involve bending our heads down and forward in a flexed position.

When this occurs, the muscles involved with extension, the opposite of flexion, try to compensate for this forward thrust. The posterior cervical muscles (in the back of the neck) become tense and sore. Spasms and trigger points (knots) often occur.

Since this condition probably develops over a period of time, it takes time to correct it. Massage of the posterior cervical muscles will relieve the tension. Also, being aware of the condition and correcting it by bringing the head up and back will return it and neck to optimal functioning.

Another condition I saw in a lot was people with their shoulders drooped forward. This is known as "forward slumped shoulders". I see this often in people in restaurants or in meetings where they just slouch

forward. Sometimes this is common with individuals who work at a desk or do a lot of upper body movements. Other times it's just a result of poor posture.

I find myself constantly trying to draw back my shoulders and straighten my spine whenever I'm sitting.

Massage treatment that focuses on decreasing tightness in the anterior (front) shoulder muscles as well as stretching of those muscles is very helpful for this condition. In addition, strengthening of the posterior shoulder girdle muscles (upper trapezius, rhomboids, latissimus dorsi and three of the rotator cuff muscles (infraspinatus, supraspinatus and teres minor) will alleviate the problem. And for others, like me, it's trying to be aware of the condition and correcting the poor posture.

One condition I observed that I can relate to personally is the "elevated shoulder" where one shoulder is higher than the other, or where both shoulders may be elevated. Tension in the upper trapezius and levator scapula muscles are often the cause. The condition is frequently seen in people who spend long hours at a desk with their arms raised to rest on the desk. Increased tension in the shoulder muscles often lead to muscle tension headaches.

In my own case it is clear that my left shoulder is higher than my right. This is due to the practice of my leaning on that shoulder on the floor in front of the television while watching the ball game. It just seems to be the most comfortable position for me. I never noticed the condition until it was pointed out to me in our medical massage classes. It was also confirmed more recently by James Waslaski, my mentor in orthopedic massage.

Massage of those tense upper back and neck muscles will relieve the tension. Stretching of the posterior cervical muscles and lateral flexors will also be helpful.

In my case, sitting up straight while watching the baseball game will help. Or, as my wife Maria suggests, don't watch so many baseball games!! I probably will cut down on them come late September.

So, the next time you're out and about, check out the postures of the people who walk by. And, be aware of your own posture. Take corrective action by getting those muscles massaged, by stretching or changing the way you sit or walk.

And, speaking of walking, as another often quoted sage named “Anonymous”, once stated, “Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes. Then, after that, who cares? He’s a mile away and you have his shoes!”

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