

# The 30 Pound Club

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## Posture

Last night, I had the opportunity to be a judge in the 2010 Mrs. Michigan America contest. Whether interviewing candidates to evaluate their poise and ability to answer questions or evaluating the evening gown competition, one thing was an important part of each assessment: posture. Someone could give wonderful answers, but sitting slouched in a chair stole the thunder from the words. The same held true for the fitness competition. A woman could look, lean but if she carried herself awkwardly, it ruined the picture.

I've talked about Paula and me taking dance lessons. A big part of dance is getting the posture correct. It's not just standing tall, although that's an important element. It's learning how to extend your head, hold your arms parallel to the ground with the fewest muscles without raising your shoulders at the same time. Once you get the right muscles trained, putting your body into the right position allows you to move more freely and with less effort.

I see men and women every day who don't carry themselves well. If they would just hold in their abdominal muscles, they would instantly lose two or three inches off their waist. These postural muscles can be trained over time. In other words, you can reset them at a new point so it takes no effort to hold in your tummy because that becomes your new posture. That becomes your posture during rest as well as activity.

Let me give you an example. Out for a run with my running buddy, we were about 40 minutes into what was supposed to be a 90-minute run when my right knee started hurting. I began limping. We finally stopped to stretch a little when it dawned on me—I had changed my posture, stride frequency, and foot strike over the past couple of months but during this long slow run, I'd reverted to my old running style. As we started running again, I kicked in the new posture and stride. Knee pain was gone in a minute or two with no lasting effects. What had previously been new was now the new normal.

You'll probably find that as you hold in your belly, your shoulders will lower as well. That's good. Paula pointed out that one of the characteristics of the professional women dancers on *Dancing with the Stars* is that their backs appear flat; the shoulder blades are in the same plane and their shoulders are down and back. Try it—think about making your back flat, and look in a mirror to check the difference. The bonus is that as you flatten your back, your abs will tuck in a little as well because the two areas seem to work in tandem. And if flattening your back makes your chest look a little better—well, whether we're men or women, most of us won't mind that at all.

What's the point? Three things. You can teach an old dog new tricks if the dog will keep practicing. Try it. Hold your belly in and flatten your back. Contract your abs and try to touch them to your spinal cord while you work to get your shoulder blades straight and your shoulders back and down. Practice doing that every day—riding in the elevator, brushing your teeth, fixing a cup of coffee, or walking up the stairs. Any time you feel that you're leading with your belly, work on holding it in; any time you feel yourself slumping, straighten up. When you catch your reflection anywhere, realign. You'll train your muscles to reset at a new level. It will become permanent. Women typically have better posture, but men can do it as well. I retrained my abs when I was a kid, and it's now some 50 years later.

Second, there will be some discomfort when you start any new physical act, but if you keep practicing, it will become part of you. When you revert to the old, your body will rebel like happened to me. You're working on a new you, and getting your body aligned during work and at rest is part of it.

Third, chances are you'll find that by holding yourself straighter and more confidently, you'll actually start to feel more confident. The people around you will probably notice, either consciously or subconsciously. Who knows what that new confidence will do for your personal and work life?

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

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