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Winter 2011

# Natural Alignment for Functional Pain-free living

by Michaëlle Edwards



Being aligned with good posture is an essential element for a healthy life and longevity. Without proper spine and body alignment, our breath and movements are restricted, and our lives are afflicted with pain, illness and movement limitations. Poor and dysfunctional postural patterns seem almost normal in old age and yet bad posture in our youth is now an epidemic.

Mannequins in the teen section reflect rounded shoulders, hyper-extended knees and forward head position.

## BAD POSTURE IS EVERYWHERE

In the Western world poor posture is a fact of life. People with rounded shoulders, hunched upper backs, and forward head carriage are everywhere. This is an epidemic that is going to cost untold millions of dollars in treatment in the coming years.

The human body is designed to move, and yet most of us spend a good deal of our lives in a chair or car. The human body cannot be comfortable sitting because no matter how you design it, upright right-angled chair-sitting is bad for the body. Sitting puts backward and downward forces on the pelvis and sacrum. Because this is already an uncomfortable position, we slump or slouch into the back rest of the chair, weakening core muscle stability and perpetuating discomfort.

Our children are forced to sit for 5 to 6 hours



a day at school and it appears as if we're educating our children's minds at the horrible expense of wrecking their spines. It is time to develop postural education in our schools and replace right-angled chairs with ergonomic desks that keep the spinal and breathing

muscles active and strong.

According to health statistics, alignment and dysfunctional posture are directly responsible for the majority of chronic aches and pains in the body.

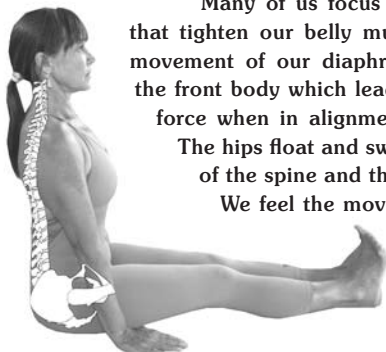
So what do we really know about alignment? There is a huge cloud of misunderstanding about how to align the body and there are many conflicting methods, rules and theories.

Natural alignment in YogAlign is based on viewing posture from the perspective of forces of dynamic tension that control how we move, and the somatic education of the nervous system being the computer that directs it. For example, when a person is naturally aligned, there is no effort or force being exerted; this is due to the balance of compression and tensile forces in the body.

Many of us focus on exercises and fitness exercises that tighten our belly muscles and wind up restricting the movement of our diaphragms and the over-contraction of the front body which leads to back pain. We feel more life-force when in alignment than when we are not aligned.

The hips float and swing from the empowered extension of the spine and the freed ribs and breathing process.

We feel the movement of our legs beginning in the center of the body where our psoas connects to our diaphragm. We feel our knees hinge easily and our feet feel like springs that



## Here is a list of what good alignment feels like.

- ◆ Standing feels easy and stable. No peripheral support is needed to stay in position.
- ◆ Breathing feels effortless and ribs are free to move and expand in all directions.
- ◆ Leg bones are aligned and centered under the pelvis. The pelvis is aligned with the rib cage.
- ◆ All weight-bearing joints—shoulder, neck, knee, spine, hip and ankle—are aligned along a central axis.
- ◆ Spine and trunk are engaged in extended stabilization providing support and space to the internal organs which are positioned comfortably with no compression forces.
- ◆ Effort to stand comes from a dynamic balance of tension, compression and inner core strength.
- ◆ Fascia lines are tuned in balance with each other so there is no force or pull on the skeleton.
- ◆ There is no pain or tension anywhere in the body and a sensation of floating, ease, and a relaxed nervous system is evident.



**SPEAKER**

support us as we move from a place of no effort.

Make sure that your sitting position and any fitness exercises or sports that you do allow your spine to stay in a naturally aligned position allowing a full deep breath.

## POOR ALIGNMENT IS EXHAUSTING

Almost everyone feels bad after sitting in a chair for too long. It is more tiring for our muscles to hold our body in a static sitting position than when we engage and release muscles by moving. The body position held while sitting in a right-angled chair causes breathing to become labored and dysfunctional because the diaphragm is compressed. This is because sitting reverses the spine's natural curves, causing the front of the vertebrae to compress. In addition, the ligaments of the sacrum, hips and pelvic floor become overstretched and/or chronically tight while chair sitting. This leads to a condition I call the "S.S.S.", or the Sagging Sacrum Syndrome. Many people are prematurely aging their spines, hips, and sacrum from exercising or sitting with the sacrum and lumbar spine flattened or reversed trying to stretch in positions that have nothing to do with the form or function of the body. These positions include trying to bend over to touch the toes with knees straight, from a standing or reclining position. Exercises that require us to bend at the waist with our knees straight are not functional or aligned with the design of our human body.

Not sure you understand that? Try to walk across the room now with both of your knees straight and it will become very apparent to you that the body does not move in that way nor should we exercise it in that way.

When we bend forward with our legs straight or sit in a chair, the ligaments connecting the sacrum to the hips become stretched out; the sacrum loses its naturally tilted position and no longer provides shock absorption to the hips and knees.

The sacrum should have a 30 degree angle in it and should never look flat or straight. A loose and sagging sacrum is a time bomb and will lead to compression of the hip and knee joint just from daily movements such as walking and sitting. As a result, overstressing these ligaments leads to arthritis, premature aging, and to the much too common hip and knee replacements.

Establishing natural spine alignment and sacral integrity is vital to becoming balanced and pain-free throughout your body. Although not consciously, many people are working their bodies to exhaustion on a daily basis by engaging in poor posture and breathing patterns that have become habituated in the nervous system. These weaknesses are reinforced by sitting, exercising—even doing yoga and exercises with positions and poses that compress the diaphragm and spine.

Attaining natural alignment happens through the process of becoming sustainable within your own body. There is no excess effort; the body moves with ease and simplicity. No huge amounts of stretching and toning are required, because there is no tension that needs to be stretched. Tone happens with each deep, unrestricted breath that massages and opens the inner body. One begins to become less a consumer of complex poses and more a radiant soul in a kid-like body.

Avoid poses like this which lead to diaphragm inhibition, sacrum destabilization and disc compression.

The YogAlign Spine Aligner allows me to take a full deep breath and simulates how we move and use our body in real life. 🌀

Written by Michaëlle Edwards based on excerpts from her upcoming book *YogAlign, Pain-free Yoga from Your Core*  
www.manayoga.com

