

Posture Affects Performance

By SGM Donnie E. Carpenter

Add poor posture to the demands of Army physical training and you see countless unnecessary injuries that cost us money, time, efficiency—and possibly even lives.

Part of the problem lies with soldiers who enter this Army with virtually no training in or awareness of good posture. Many arrive with full-blown postural deformalities.

By the time we get many of our youth into uniform, much damage has already been done. Posture directly influences the weight-bearing joints of the body and poor posture causes strain that impairs performance and contributes to pain and irritation in the neck, back, hips,



Very Poor Posture

- Head forward
- Very exaggerated curve of upper back
- Abdomen relaxed
- Chest flat
- Sloping hollow back

knees, ankles and arches.

On the other hand, good posture contributes to general health and muscular endurance while reducing muscle strain and fatigue.

When I enlisted 22 years ago, military bearing and good posture were still semi-conscious, but growing tired and sluggish. Their perceived role in military physical training was fading fast back then.



Poor Posture

- Relaxed (fatigue) posture
- Head forward
- Abdomen relaxed
- Shoulder blades prominent
- Hollow back

I came on the scene when 1969 physical training doctrine was only four years old. Military bearing was still stressed because my superiors trained under 1957 doctrine when posture training

held 20 pages and all of one chapter. The 1985 FM 21-20 deleted posture training altogether. These days a soldier can sit, stand, walk, run and march irrationally without much fear of reprimand.

Both the 1946 and 1957 PT manuals included precise exercises designed to correct muscular deficiencies associated



Fair Posture

- Head forward
- Abdomen prominent
- Exaggerated curve in upper back
- Slight hollow back

with poor posture. Even the later revisions of 1969-1980 warned that malformations of the body caused by poor military bearing impair performance and troop morale. The manuals further cautioned that these physical and accompanying psychological weaknesses, if left unchecked, might eventually become permanent disabilities.

Good posture allows opposing muscle groups to maintain balance, contributing to proper alignment of the skeletal system and optimal position of the internal organs. Poor posture leads to imbalances often

characterized by round shoulders, flat chest, sway back, protruding abdomen and tilted pelvis. These and other related deformities look terrible, contribute to a host of orthopedic problems and impair movement.

Poor posture also is associated with sensory integration dysfunction (SID). Soldiers with SID simply can't move well because this condition interferes with equilibrium, balance and protective responses. When soldiers with SID are required to make any kind of movement beyond their normal and extremely limited range, it's not

uncommon to see nausea, hypersensitivity to movement, perspiration, increased respiratory rate, etc.

When Army leaders rebuilt physical training doctrine during and after World War II, they called upon a famous physical educator named Dr. Charles McCloy for advice. He taught that "good posture is that adjustment of the various parts of the whole, in harmony with the individual's own bony and ligamentous architecture, which gives the greatest mechanical efficiency, the least interference with organic function and the greatest freedom from strains."

McCloy's timeless advice may be couched in some long words, but if it's



SIT TALL

- Chin in
- Shoulders relaxed
- Chest raised
- Upper back and hips in line
- Belt parallel with floor
- Upper legs on chair
- Lower legs vertical
- Feet flat on floor

simple enough for a crusty old sergeant major to understand, it should certainly be clear to the hordes of physical fitness experts calling for reform in our current approach.

I commend the physical therapy community for reminding us that good posture and military bearing is an underlying foundation upon which to build an effective physical readiness program. They have given us all a friendly little slap on the back of the head. Now it's time to straighten up, get smart

and fix the problem. ■

Carpenter is currently assigned to the United States Army Physical Fitness School (USAPFS), Ft. Benning, GA.