

## POSTURE AFFECTS FUNCTION AND BALANCE

This activity provides three hands-on activities, Breathe Easy, Anchors A-Sway, and Bent Over Posture, to show participants more ways in which posture can affect ordinary aspects of their lives.

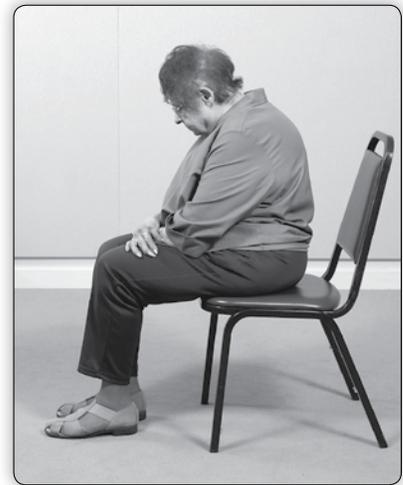
### ***Benefits*** »

- ⦿ Reveals how posture affects breathing.
- ⦿ Explores how posture affects tipping points.
- ⦿ Shows how posture affects needing to take a quick step when walking.

### ***How to Do It*** »

#### ***Breathe Easy***

- ⦿ Take a breath from a slouching posture.
- ⦿ Participants round their back, drop their head, and roll their shoulders forward.
- ⦿ Ask them to take a deep breath.
  - Can they? (It's a little difficult.)
  - Is their breathing restricted by this slouching posture? (Yes.)
  
- ⦿ Take a breath using tall posture. Coach them from their slouch into a tall sit.
- ⦿ Ask them to sit tall and pull their head back.
- ⦿ Ask them to breathe in deeply.
  - Was that a little easier this time? Noticeably easier? (Yes.)
  - Did posture seem to make a difference?
  - Have them do it again for effect and their own personal reference.



### *Anchors A-Sway*

This activity helps participants find their tipping point and feel how it relates to posture. The feet are their base of support. How they position their body parts over the feet has an immediate effect on balance stability. Some postures set them up for a fall; leaning forward is one of the more precarious positions.

- ⦿ A walker, handrail, or instructor needs to be in front of each participant for this activity. Put down a line of tape on the floor in front of the participant (or use a line in the carpet or flooring). The line serves as a visual starting point for participants to stand behind. Set up a line for yourself, too, so you can demonstrate.
- ⦿ Stand behind the line on the floor and demonstrate for the group. Lean forward from your ankles and reach out with one arm until you must take a quick step forward to avert a fall. Tell them that's your tipping point, and now you'd like them to play with theirs.
- ⦿ Invite willing participants, one at a time, to stand behind their line and try just the reaching. Get them to reach forward, with one or both arms out, just a little.
- ⦿ Can they already feel their tipping point move forward?
- ⦿ Invite them to sway or lean forward from their ankles, going just far enough that they start to feel their tipping point.
  - Do they feel the tendency to tip?
  - Do they feel their toes digging in?
  - How far can they lean before they think they need to take a step?
- ⦿ Have participants bend their knees and push their hips backward a bit. See if you can get them to bend their knees in a way that drops their hips backward behind the position of their feet. Now have them lean forward again.
  - Does this change their tipping point? (It will.)
  - Why do they think this is so? (More of their body weight is behind them as an anchor when their hips are back).
- ⦿ Have participants stand with the feet in an offset position so that the feet still are shoulder-width apart but one foot is forward and one back.
  - Can they reach farther now without tipping?
  - Do they feel much safer?
  - Why do they think this is so? (The feet are offset in the direction of the reach, providing a wider base of support.)
- ⦿ Assume the bent over posture (see the following activity).
  - Do they notice some forward leaning as they assume the position?
  - What if they were to stand just a little taller? Can they feel that change?



### ***Bent Over Posture***

Slouched, forward-leaning postures can slow the quick initiation of a needed step. For example, in the previous activity, Anchors A-Sway, once a person reaches the tipping point, a quick step may be needed to arrest a fall. Individuals who habitually slouch forward may not be able to bring their quick stepping foot out to stop their fall as quickly as someone with tall posture. In other words, poor posture can be a fall risk. Bent Over Posture literally takes Anchors A-Sway to the next step.

The Bent Over Posture also affects our tipping point, as they just experienced. But it also affects how participants walk, shortening stride length. Long strides work better with a tall posture. The emphasis for this activity is for them to feel how posture affects their tipping point and the mechanics of taking a quick step.

- ◎ To start, demonstrate what a quick step looks like. Stand in front of the class and assume what you call the bent over position.
- ◎ Display a forward lean, with rounded shoulders that hunch forward, a slouching back, a lowered head, and bent knees. Then tip yourself forward until a step is needed to prevent your fall.

### ***Take a Step with Bent Over Posture***

- ◎ Each participant should have a walker, a handrail, or an instructor in front. Do this activity by taking turns. They will watch each other and learn that way, too.
- ◎ Have participants assume the bent over posture—head lowered, back rounded, and knees flexed. They don't need to lean.
- ◎ At your command, have them take a quick, self-arresting safety step.
- ◎ Ask them to remember how fast they were able to get that stepping leg out in front.



### ***Take a Step From a Tall Posture***

- ⦿ Now, tell them to stand with a younger, taller posture: Take a deep Smell the Coffee breath, lift the spine tall, bring the shoulders over the hips, and brace the abdominals. They should keep their weight equal on both feet.
- ⦿ Invite them to lean toward their tipping point just a bit.
- ⦿ Now ask them to take a quick self-arresting safety step.
- ⦿ Was it much quicker to step from a position of upright posture? (Lots quicker.)
- ⦿ Repeat the two postures for clarity.



### ***Walk With Bent Over Posture***

- ⦿ Participants begin walking. Have them assume the Bent Over Posture.
- ⦿ Ask them to notice how their leg swings feel. Are leg swings easily initiated? (Not really)

### ***Walk More Upright***

- ⦿ Ask participants to walk tall and upright, as a younger person.
- ⦿ Do they feel younger and stronger?
- ⦿ Ask them to notice how their leg swings feel now. Are they easier?

### ***Alternate Bent Over, Up Tall***

- ⦿ Focus on ease of leg swings; that's the biggest change they will feel.
- ⦿ Do a couple repetitions of each posture.
- ⦿ Ask them for their thoughts on which posture they prefer and why.

### ***Keep It Safe »***

Not all participants will be comfortable leaning until they are close to their tipping point, and that's fine. They don't have to lean; they can just change their posture and the activity will still work. The point is not to make them nearly fall, but to feel how posture affects them. As always, provide modifications and balance supports (e.g., walkers, sturdy chairs, handrails) so that as many as possible will give it a try. Those who don't try will still learn from those who do.

### ***Live It »***

Good posture affects how we breathe, feel, and move. Breathe Easy means breathing is easier with good posture. Anchors A-Sway allows participants to experience how posture affects their tipping point, and Bent Over Posture helps them feel the changes in the mechanics of stepping and walking. Taking a quick step and walking are easier with upright posture.