



What is forward head posture & why you should pay attention!

I came back from my holidays with a mission: to work on my forward head posture! It all started with a workshop I attended where the instructor pointed out my forward head and rounded shoulders—two characteristics typical of forward head posture.

I already knew this about myself. But I came back to the studio inspired to work on it and I've been taking my classes and clients along for the ride. Now you can join us too!

What is forward head posture



Forward head posture is just what it says it is. Instead of balancing on top of the spine, the head sits ahead of the rest of the body.

Ideally the cervical spine (neck) should have a concave, or lordotic, curve of about 43 degrees. This gives the neck some spring and flexibility, allowing it to respond as we move.

With forward head posture the cervical curve becomes shallower and may even disappear as the head shifts forward. Not only is the neck less able to absorb the motions we make but the effects can also cascade all the way down the spine and beyond.

What does forward head do to the neck?

There are many ways that forward head posture develops. For many of us, it has to do with how we spend our days—in front of computers, driving, texting—sitting, hunched over and rounded forward.



Idea curve

Forward head

Over time, our muscles get used to working in this position, the brain gets re-programmed and we develop a pattern that becomes a habit. The brain's ability to change like this is called neuroplasticity.

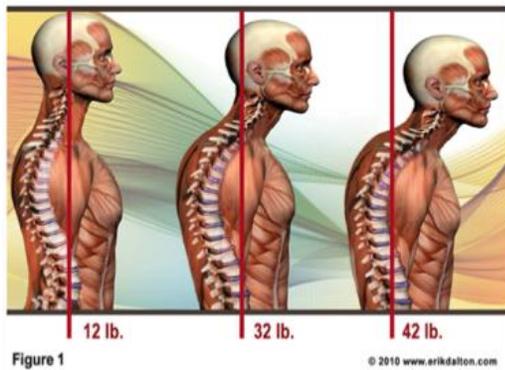
Other causes of forward head posture could include trauma of some kind, like whiplash. The same body patterns can develop as we adapt to pain or the effects of an injury.

As you can see from the xray images, when the head sits forward, the cervical curve is reduced compared with the ideal curve. In some cases it disappears altogether.

In response, the chest and neck muscles shorten at the back, while the upper back muscles lengthen, to accommodate the forward shift of the head.

What happens in the rest of the spine?

According to well-known orthopedist Dr. A. Kapanji, author of *The Physiology of Joints*, every inch forward increases the weight of the head on the spine by an additional 10 pounds. That's a lot of extra weight for the neck and upper back to support!



Eric Dalton, founder of the Freedom from Pain Institute, illustrates how a 12 pound head can end up weighing 42 pounds when the head shifts forward three inches!

Even a slight shift forward can cause compression and strain on the bones, muscles, ligaments and other tissues in the neck, upper back, shoulders and beyond. This creates instability and increases the risk of arthritis, impingement and other issues.

A forward head also changes the body's centre of gravity, causing the spinal column to elongate and the spinal cord to stretch. This can change how nerves fire, which then affects how the brain regulates body functions like breathing, digestion and so on.

By [Jane Aronovitch](#) | August 6th, 2014 |