Posture Education in Schools

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The term ‘posture’ is applied to be carriage of the body or to say "correct alignment of different parts of the body”. Similarly, malposture means faulty carriage or incorrect alignment of different parts of body in respect to each other. A correct posture is a position where the bodily structure is vertically aligned and the muscles are as relaxed as possible. A correct posture also allows organic systems to function efficiently and at the same time it contributes most to the attractiveness of the person. But now more modern acceptable term for posture is "body mechanics", because this signifies not only held positions but also movements.

Key words : Body Mechanics, Posture Education, Malpostures

Development and Importance of Posture

The fully erect position is a comparatively recent development in the history of mankind. Assumption of this position, while it has helped the progress of man by the freedom obtained by the forelimbs, has put a strain on the muscular system. The erect position is not assumed or maintained easily. Little children do not attain it properly, until about three years. To assume and to maintain this position correctly, a constant muscular strength by opposing groups of muscles is needed. If these muscles become weak, then their natural tendency will be to flex the joints instead of extending them. Weak and relaxed muscles lead to slumping, drooping and exaggerated curves producing bad postures and at the same time reducing physical and organic efficiency of the body. The over-emphasis on classroom instructions, for instance, asking young pupils to sit quietly for hours together at their desks, etc. are some of the factors which lead to the numerous malpostures. The correct posture is important because (i) it affects the functioning of the organic systems; (ii) it
reduces strain on muscles, ligaments, and tendons; and (iii) it increases attractiveness of the individual. In addition to affecting one’s ability and her/his attractiveness, posture may influence a person’s concept of herself/himself and how others view her/him.

**Harmful Effects of Poor Posture**

1. **Effect on efficiency**: When the human frame is not properly balanced and correctly held, the individual has to use his body at a mechanical disadvantage leading to reduced efficiency and lack of grace and poise. Poor posture means a body that is too rigid or too erect. By research it has been found that military attention position requires 20 per cent more energy than an easy standing position and that an extremely relaxed standing position requires 10 per cent less energy than the easy standing position.

2. **Effect on vital organs**: The functions of the vital organs are affected when the heart, lungs, liver and other organs in the trunk are cramped and unduly pressed then the normal functions of circulation, respiration, digestion, etc. are interfered and hence they work with the lesser efficiency. For instance, a rigid (at attention) standing position restricts circulation. Research results indicate that changes in posture influence the heart-rate in static positions and also influence the required cardiac output during exercise.

3. **Effect on personal appearance**: Due to poor posture the personal appearance becomes depressing and uninspiring. An upright body held high with an active springy way commends respect and admiration, while on the other hand, crooked carriage reflects weakness and dullness.

4. **Effect on mental attitude**: Slumping and slouching of the body reflects mental depression and dullness. A well-held position indicates mental alertness and active spirit for work. Posture has strong psychological implications. It tells much about one’s personality. For example, withdrawn and shy persons often display a withdrawn-type posture, as if they are attempting to hide within themselves. The opposite-type personality (highly aggressive) often displays a very outgoing posture, which makes one feel more obvious.

**Causes of Malpostures**

Broadly speaking, malpostures can be divided into three main heads: (i) Structural malpostures; (ii) Malpostures due to long illness; and (iii) Functional malpostures. The first two types of malpostures are the concern of medical men and should be treated through clinics. Similarly, some cases of postural correction are more a task for psychiatrists than physical educators because many times the deviations grow out of psychological problems. School authorities should deal with functional malpostures. Current thinking is that postural evaluation must be approached from a highly individual and functional point of view. The judgement of how to correct a posture is must be based on corrections from the physiological,
anatomical and aesthetic points of view.

Given below are the main reasons for functional malpostures:

(i) **Muscular weakness**: When the muscles are weak and flabby due to lack of exercise, the normal tendency is to droop, i.e. allowing the spine to assume exaggerated curves, abdominal muscles relax and the viscera too protrudes forward.

(ii) **Malnourishment**: Nutrition affects body structure, and a person with poor nourishment may have neither energy nor the muscular strength and tone to habitually hold the body parts in correct position. Inadequate nutrition may contribute to poor posture especially during the years of bodily growth when consistently poor temporary body positions gradually become part of habitual posture.

(iii) **Faulty desks and seats**: The use of these types of desks and seats is very often the cause of bed postures especially among school children. Desks which are too high or low compel the child to stretch or to high causes pressure on the arteries of the leg and seats which are too low cause slouching. Seats placed too far from desk call for excessive leaning forward, cramping of the chest and the abdomen. Even if good and proper furniture is available, poor habits of reading and writing, holding the position in slouched position, etc. can also cause poor postures.

(iv) **Defective eye-sight or hearing**: Both these defects have bad effects on posture. They compel the child to lean forward, while trying to read from the blackboard or to hear the teacher.

(v) **Improper exercises**: This type of exercises and activities can bring about poor posture. The school-going children should be properly guided in this matter and at the same time they should be checked from time to time.

(vi) **Typical occupations**: Certain type of occupations may also cause malpostures, for example, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, etc. Because such persons continuously do the same type of work for hours together without giving any exercise to their respective antagonistic muscles. Thus some part of their body become well developed, while other parts remain underdeveloped.

(vii) **Too rapid growth during adolescence**: During this period the bones grow quicker than the muscles, thus throwing the body out of alignment and causing ‘forward swoop’ which is technically known as ‘kyphosis’. Similarly a person’s height may influence his posture. Short people tend to be extremely tall. Tall people tend to reduce their height by sitting at the joins and hunching at the upper back and back.

(viii) **Carrying weights**: By carrying of heavy weights daily or a bundle of books or other loads, e.g. carrying
a baby on one side or on the hips, may cause a lateral curvature of the spine.

**Use of improper belongings**: Fitting tightly worn clothes, e.g. narrow-cut pants or salvars may check free movements of the body and in the long run may develop malpostures. Similarly, narrow-toe shoes or high-heeled shoes may also cause bad posture because in such cases the bearer has to walk in somewhat unnatural way.

**Poor posture of teachers**: The poise and posture of the teachers is very important for the school-going students, because they keep their teachers as their example and try to copy their postures. Thus a teacher having a poor posture may develop similar habits among his students. Only for this reason in the USA and the UK, persons having faulty postures are not generally preferred for teaching profession.

**Heredity and environment**: A parent with severe scoliosis will be likely to produce children with scoliosis, whereas a parent with round shoulders and a forward-neck tilt will tend to produce children who are inclined the same way. Postural similarities between parents and children may result partly from heredity and partly from environment. Children inherit many qualities, but they tend to develop after the models that exist in their environments.

**Correction of Malpostures**

The first step in correcting malpostures is to understand what a particular form of poor posture a child has. Every physical educator must find out all such causes which contribute to the malpostures among his students. Before attempting any corrective work, every effort should be made to remove or check the necessary contributing cause or causes. Every physical educator should first of all try to improve the general tone and condition of the body of each student and at the same time should suggest specific exercises for specific students. Malpostures are often caused by faulty habits and improvement can be brought about by correcting such habits. Every physical educator should keep in mind that “no amount of exercise will bring about the desired result unless the individual herself/himself desires for it.” Experience shows that the following are the most successful postural corrective procedures:

1. Correctly identify the postural deviation and inform the individual of its nature and the importance of correcting it.
2. Attempt to identify the basic causes of the deviation, and control the causes.
3. Motivate the individual to correct the deviation. In the absence of such motivation, postural corrective exercises will probably fail.
4. Prescribe an exercise programme designed to correct the condition.
5. Periodically evaluate the effects of the programme.