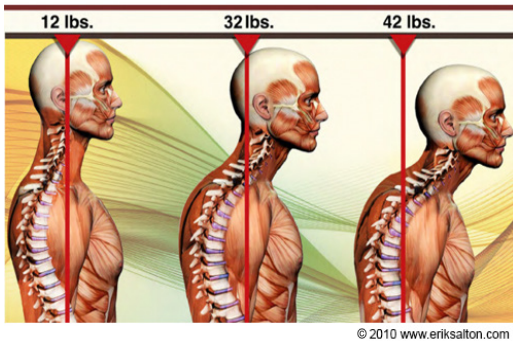


HOW HEAVY IS YOUR HEAD?

By Dr. Pamela Marzban

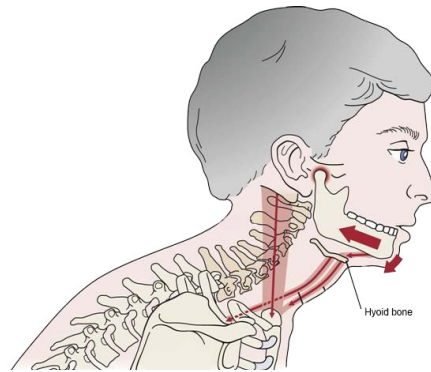
Did you know that the human head weighs 10-12 pounds? Probably, thanks to the little kid from the movie Jerry Maguire. However, did you know that for every inch your head is forward of your shoulders you add 10-15 pounds of extra weight to your joints, muscles, ligaments and nerves that help support posture you head? That's why people end up with degenerative joint disease, herniated discs, bulging discs, tingling extremities and the list goes on.



Our posture we think is about standing up straight or not slouching. We blame it on carrying big purses or heavy backpacks and being on computers all day but our posture is not truly about that. While we have grown into a face forward society that upper neck pain and fatigue many people suffer from is due to a forward head posture. Our posture is not a conscious decision we make, it is subconscious and has to do with survival.

Research has shown that there is a direct anatomical correlation between our lower jaw (mandible) position and neck (cervical) posture. As we grow as infants, the way our face develops greatly depends on where our tongue rests and how we swallow. Tongue posturing starts to structure how wide and how full our upper and lower jaw shapes and that will determine how our teeth come into alignment. Once our adult teeth are all in, that alignment is complete and this position will dictate where we posture our mandible from now on.

So how does this affect our posture? Let's say that the mandible ended up in a retruded position. As the jaw sits down and back the tongue is carried down and our hyoid bone (neck bone) is displaced down and back, both narrowing the airway. The body responds by changing head and neck posture to open up the airway by bringing the head forward to compensate for the insult on the airway. We must remember the most important thing in everyone's life is breathing. We will deal with and suffer from neck and shoulder pain; but our next breath is the most important thing. So to achieve that next breath comfortably, we modify our posture.



So if we understand that forward head posturing is a result of an innate survival instinct to breathe better, then know that this is not just a sit or stand issue but it also can affect us during our sleep. In fact, laying back causes the jaw and tongue to retrude even further. This is why people snore when they are not sick and may suffer from sleep apnea.

Depending on the age or how long a person has been physically accommodating to this position, much of this condition can be reversible. You start by finding a dentist that has extensive training to treat temporomandibular dysfunction (TMD) and works with other allied professionals to collaboratively treat the systemic condition.

Dr. Pamela Marzban is a dentist in practice in Fairfax County. If you have dental questions you can call her at 703-323-8200 or visit her at www.marzbandds.com

