

## Instructions on using your 42-pound head poster

Forward head posture is one of the most common postural deviations seen in a bodywork practice. It is not only responsible for many cases of head and neck pain, but as you'll soon find out, can cause a whole variety of health issues. Becoming proficient at treating forward head posture is one of the most significant ways you can help your clients. And getting results in this area will earn you a loyal client and a stream of referrals from both clients and health professionals.

Although, many clients have head forward postures to some degree or another, most are completely oblivious to it. Typically, we only ever see ourselves from the front when looking into a mirror and rarely from the side. When you point out that their head is forward of their body, they are often shocked. They may focus on the aesthetics of the posture by saying something like, "I don't want a hump like my mom." And that's often motivation enough to do something about it. But they don't really understand the full ramifications of this posture over time.

So along with the poster I've also included an article which highlights the detrimental effects of this type of posture. You have my permission to print copies out and pass them onto your clients.

### How to best use this in your practice

Clients are not going to take care of a problem if they are not aware they have it, so you need to make them aware of the issues. So here is a simple step-by-step process you can go through to help your clients become aware of their posture and get the treatment they need.

1. To begin with, put this poster up in your room to stimulate discussion. You may want to have it laminated.
2. When working on your client's neck and head in a supine position, mention in passing that they have what you call a "head forward posture" or in more technical terms, "upper crossed syndrome."
3. If their head is unsupported on the table, you can point out that they have a rather large space between the table and their neck because of the excessive curve of their neck. You can also point out that if they pay attention, they'll notice that their head is tilted back slightly and they are not looking straight up at the ceiling, but actually looking slightly towards the wall behind them.
4. Let them know you want them to enjoy the massage, but you'll discuss this in more detail with them later.
5. After they are up and dressed, show them your 42-pound head poster and point out what normal healthy posture looks like with the image on the left. The head is over the body and is supported by the spine. You can point out how the ear is directly over the edge of the shoulder (acromion). Then show them what happens with head forward posture and outline some of the detrimental effects of this type of postural deviation. You can refer to the article below.

6. Ask them if you can take a picture of them to show them what you see. Use your smartphone to take a snapshot of them from the side in their normal posture. Point out the position of their ear relative to their shoulder and compare this to the images in the poster to show them their current degree of deviation.
7. At this point, they are likely quite shocked (maybe even a little horrified). They've never seen themselves from this vantage point before and were completely unaware of the degree of deviation from normal.
8. You might need to give them assurances that all is not doom and gloom. These kinds of deviations can always be improved with treatment and some home retraining exercises.
9. Briefly outline your treatment approach for dealing with this kind of issue and suggest a specific treatment plan for them. Be sure to tell them very specifically how often they should come in and how long each session should be. Then, book a series of treatments for them right away.

You'll find that by going through this process, you've made the first step in establishing yourself as an expert. You've pointed out something that no other health professional has taken the time to tell them about. And by establishing your expertise in this way, you'll have a motivated client who is committed to their treatment and is consistent with coming in for appointments on a regular basis.

## **You need to be an expert**

Of course, it goes without saying that you need to deliver results for your client. This is a serious issue for your client and you have to do more to resolve their problem than simply doing a five to ten minute neck massage at the end of your treatment. Resolving head forward posture requires that you have a comprehensive and systematic approach to treatment of upper crossed syndrome. You need to have a thorough understanding of the biomechanics of posture and understand how the dysfunction in the neck is related to the entire body from the feet up. You also need to understand that this kind of postural dysfunction is not just biomechanical. It has a neurological component of inhibited and facilitated muscle activation that needs to be addressed.

Unfortunately, because of the limited time you had in massage school and the volume of material you had to learn, it's likely that posture, and more specifically upper and lower crossed syndromes, received little more than rudimentary coverage in your foundational training.

It's so important to have a deep understanding of posture, its implications on your client's health, and a systematic and comprehensive approach to treatment. By developing expertise in this area, you'll have a roster of delighted clients who are thrilled with your work and you'll guarantee yourself a full, healthy practice.

To help yourself along this path, consider getting certified with our Posture, Pain, Performance program. This is a home study program that will familiarize you with all the issues mentioned above and more.

This short guided program will earn you 20 continuing education hours and will establish you as an authority on posture and pain. On successful completion you'll receive an impressive certificate that you can post in your treatment room for your clients to see. For full details check out this page on our website: <https://erikdalton.com/courses/posture-pain-performance/>

### Your homestudy package includes:

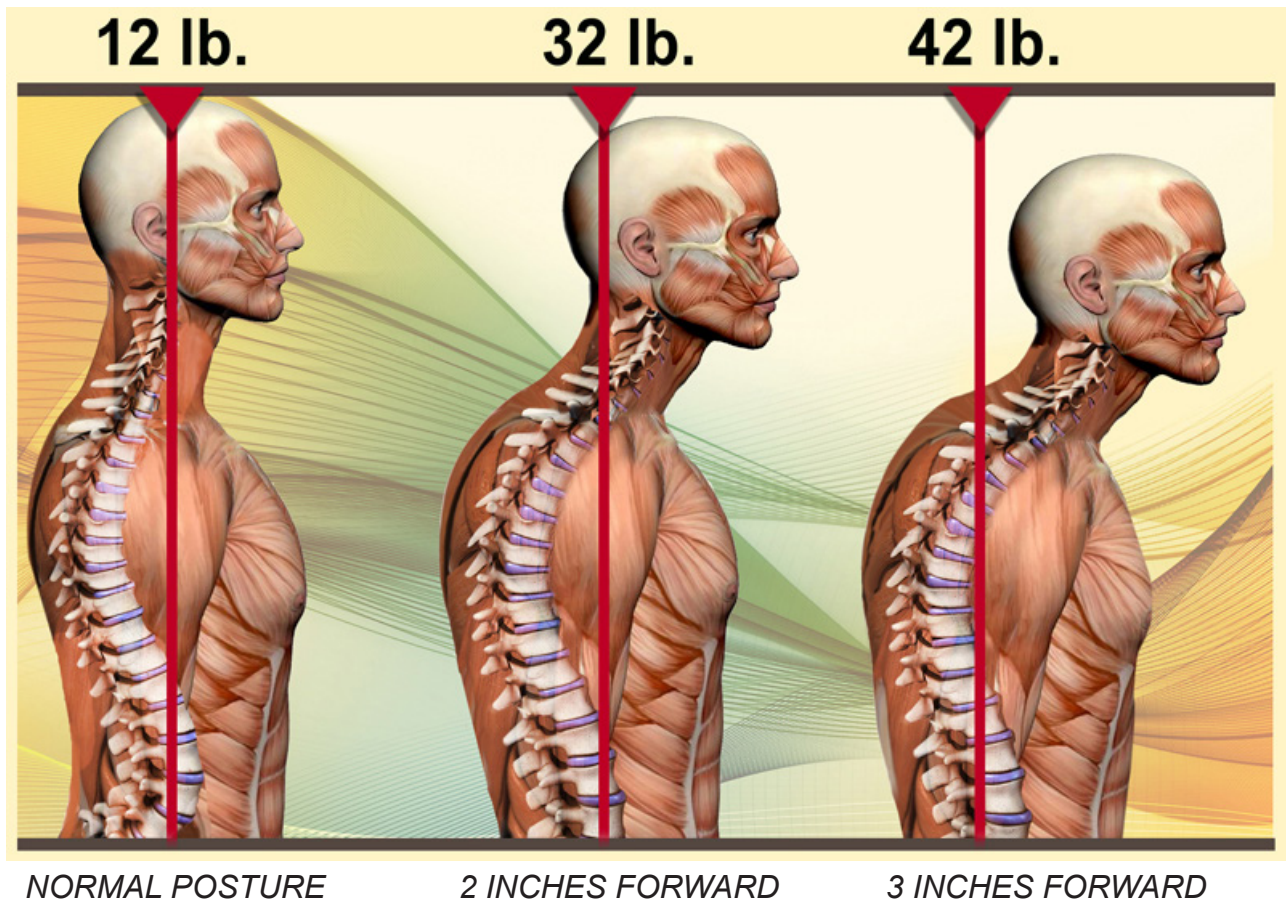
- The textbook “Myoskeletal Alignment Techniques: Posture, Pain, Performance”
- Three DVD set that takes you through a systemized treatment protocol
- Access to the Dalton Myoskeletal Facebook Group where you can ask questions
- On passing the course test, you will receive a certificate of completion for the Posture,Pain,Performance course.



**[Order this package today](#) to help clients and fill your practice**

# The 42 Pound Head

by Erik Dalton, Ph.D.



***“For every inch of Forward Head Posture, it can increase the weight of the head on the spine by an additional 10 pounds.”*** Rene Calliet, MD

**Figure 1**

When we look at ourselves from the front in a mirror, we look relatively balanced. But turn to the side and we get a very different picture.

From the side, the bones that make up our spine (the vertebrae) should line up relatively neatly, like a stack of bricks and the weight of our body should fall through the center of the hips and the center of the foot. But that’s not often the case.

Get a friend to take a picture of you from the side. Compare your picture to Figure 1. Which of those three figures best illustrates your posture? If your posture is healthy, your ear canal should line up with the bony bit at the outside of your shoulder - like the person on the left in the illustration. When your spine is lined up like this, your head, which weighs about 12 pounds, is supported by the vertebrae and your neck muscles are relaxed and stress-free.

But it’s likely that your head is a little forward of that vertical line. As soon as your head moves off that vertical axis and begins migrating forward, your vertebrae are no longer a neatly stacked pile of blocks. Instead, they are like a tower that is falling over. The muscles in your neck have to

tighten to fight the increased pull of gravity and to hold your head up.

The more your head is forward of the centerline, the more the muscles have to work against the unrelenting force of gravity. It's not uncommon to see a client's head that has migrated three inches forward of their shoulders. Because the body is not biomechanically equipped to handle this sustained posture, it puts a load on your muscles that makes it seem as though your head weighs up to 42 pounds.

Rene Cailliet M.D., former director of the department of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Southern California has studied this type of posture and has found that:

- Head in forward posture can add up to thirty pounds of abnormal leverage on the cervical spine. This can pull the entire spine out of alignment.
- Forward head posture may result in the loss of 30% of vital lung capacity. These breath-related deficits happen because the muscles on the front of the neck that lift the ribs during inhalation become too weak to work effectively. Proper rib lifting action is essential for complete aeration of the lungs (Figure 2 Anterior Scalenes)
- The entire gastrointestinal system (particularly the large intestine) may become agitated from head forward posture resulting in sluggish bowel function and evacuation.

*“Most attempts to correct posture are directed toward the spine, shoulders and pelvis. All are important, but, head position takes precedence over all others. The body follows the head. Therefore, the entire body is best aligned by first restoring proper functional alignment to the head”. [1]*

Dr Rene Cailliet M.D., Director of the department of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Southern California

## **The effects of poor posture go far beyond just looking awkward**

This head forward posture just doesn't look good and eventually causes a compensatory hump in your upper back. But looks are just a minor consideration when you consider the role of head position in pain problems and spinal degeneration.

The January, 2004 issue of the American Journal of Pain Management reported on the relationship of poor posture and chronic pain conditions including low back pain, neck related headaches, and stress-related illnesses. “The extra pressure imposed on the neck from poor posture flattens the normal cervical curve resulting in abnormal strain on muscles, ligaments, fascia and bones.” [2]

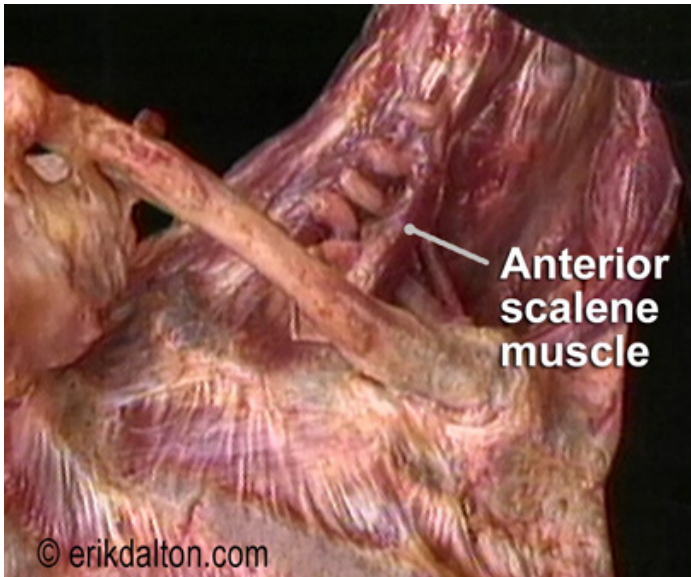
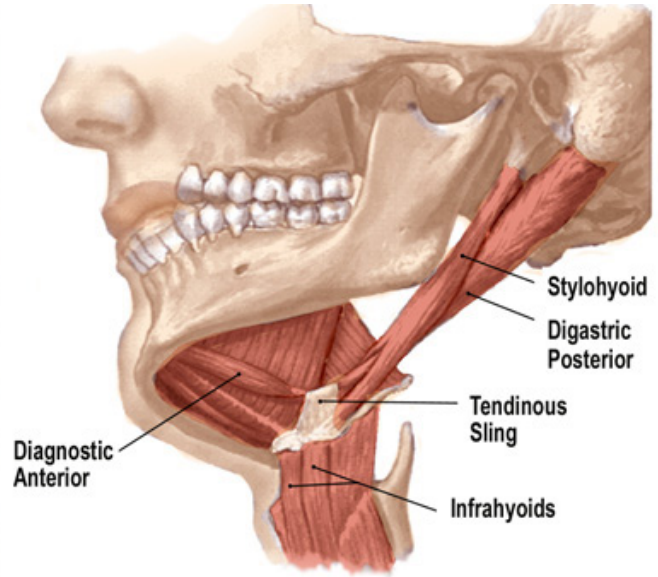


Figure 2



Research presented at the 31st Annual International Conference of the IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society, Minneapolis, Minnesota, (2009) stated; “Over time poor posture results in pain, muscle aches, tension and headache and can lead to long term complications such as osteoarthritis. Forward head carriage may promote accelerated aging of intervertebral joints resulting in degenerative joint disease.” [3] See Figure 3.

It appears posture impacts and modulates all bodily functions from breathing to hormonal production. Spinal pain, headache, mood, blood pressure, pulse and lung capacity are among the many conditions influenced by faulty posture.

Additionally, Dr Roger Sperry demonstrated that 90% of the brain’s energy output is used in relating the physical body to gravity. Only 10% has to do with thinking, metabolism, and healing. [4]

### Identifying Common Compensatory Patterns

Fortunately, the legendary biomedical researcher Vladimir Janda, MD has helped simplify assessment of commonly seen muscle imbalance patterns consistent with forward head posture. Janda’s Upper Crossed Syndrome (Figure 4) is

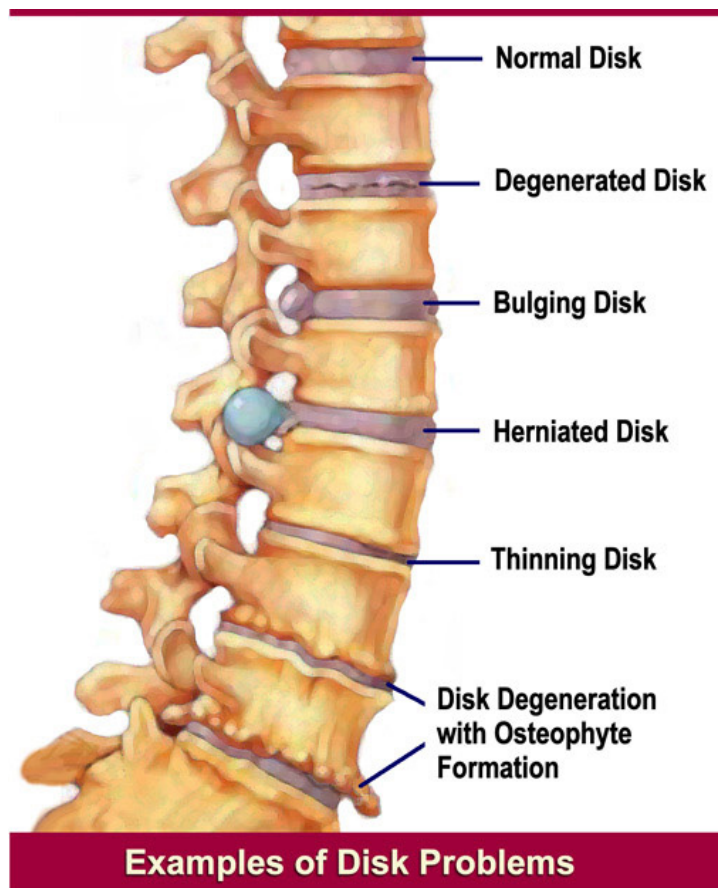


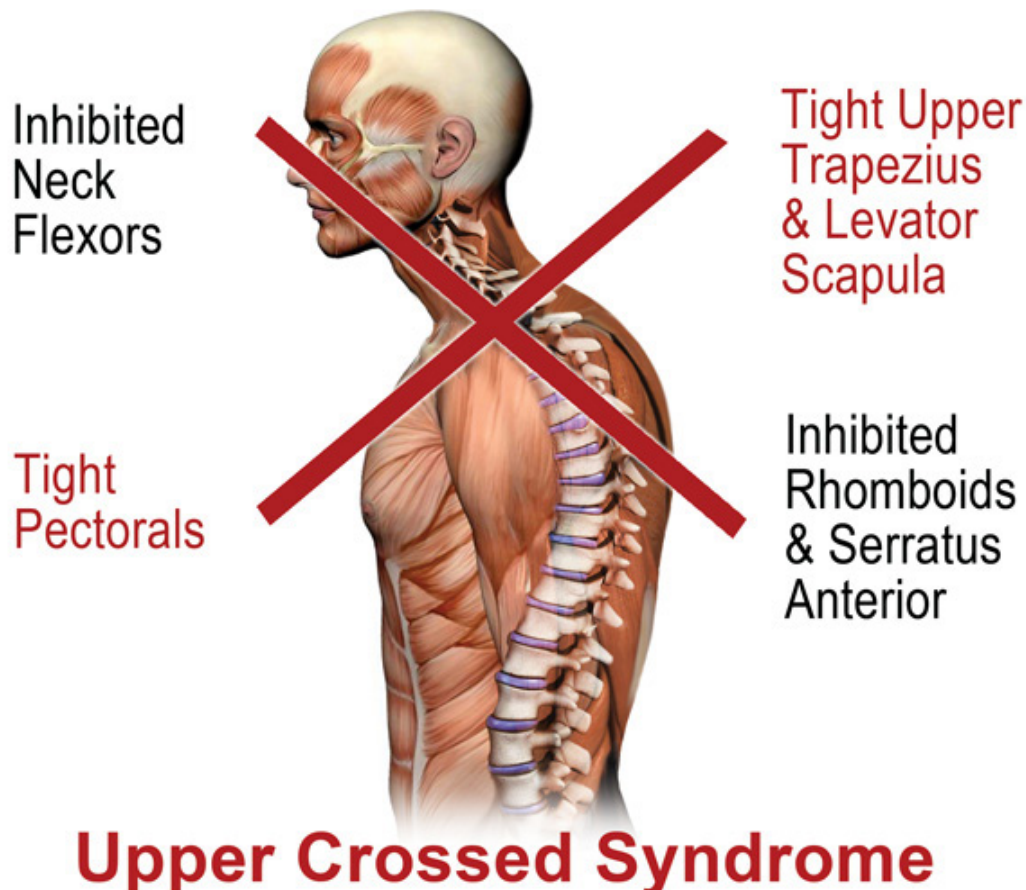
Figure 3

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*“90% of the stimulation and nutrition to the brain is generated by the movement of the spine”*

~ Dr. Roger Sperry, Nobel Prize Recipient for Brain Research

characterized by overactivity or tightness in the muscles at the back of the neck and front of the chest (upper trapezius, levator, suboccipitals, sternocleidomastoids and pectoralis major) and reciprocal weakness of the muscles in the front of the neck and the mid-back muscles.



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Figure 4

Trained therapists visually recognize this aberrant pattern through postural analysis, muscle length testing and by feeling the muscles for changes. If you develop the pattern, it starts to feel normal over time and is reinforced by pain, joint tightness or muscle imbalances. You often don't recognize that your muscles are compensating significantly to maintain this unbalanced posture until you start experiencing pain or other physical symptoms.

## **Some common symptoms in people with Upper Crossed Syndrome include:**

- Headaches
- Mouth breathing (sleep apnea)
- Difficulty swallowing
- Teeth clenching
- Face & neck pain
- Migraine headaches
- Uncoordinated movement and loss of body balance

The neck is burdened with the challenging task of both supporting and moving the human head. Because of tension, trauma, sedentary work, and poor postural habits inherent in today's workplace, it comes as no surprise that neck disorders rank high among the most common pain problem that cause people to visit a massage therapist.

When spinal tissues are exposed to continued compression because of forward head posture, they deform and go through a transformation that can become permanent. That can lead to degenerative joint disease and pain from headaches, rib dysfunction, TMJ, and Dowager's Humps.

This is not news. As far back as March 2000 the Mayo Clinic Health Letter reported that prolonged forward head posture also leads to "myospasm, disc herniations, arthritis and pinched nerves." Degenerative neck pain goes hand-in-hand with balance problems especially in the elderly.

Signals from the first four cervical (neck) vertebrae produced by movement are a major source of stimuli for regulating important pain-controlling chemicals called endorphins. Forward head posture dramatically reduces endorphin production by limiting the cervical spine's range of motion and causes non-painful sensations to be experienced as pain.

## **Help is available**

The good news is that most symptoms, like those mentioned above, can be minimized or eliminated altogether with the help of a qualified Myoskeletal Therapist. A Myoskeletal Therapist is a massage therapist with advanced training in treating a range of physical conditions. Some Myoskeletal Therapists are trained specifically to analyze and treat problems related to poor posture and their training allows them to be highly effective at minimizing pain and helping improve performance.

Correction of Upper Crossed neck posture is key to stopping and possibly reversing decay, degenerative changes and pain from headaches, rib dysfunction, TMJ, and Dowager's Hump. However, given the extent of changes that occur before the problem is usually identified, expect it to take some time and a concerted effort to repair the damage caused by faulty neck posture.

As a first step in restoring proper muscle balance and minimizing your head forward posture, a Myoskeletal therapist will typically manipulate specific muscles to mobilize dysfunctional joints



to help restore normal movement and help reprogram normal neurological movement patterns. Once normal joint movement is established and protective muscle tension is reduced, structural integrative soft tissue work is performed. This helps address length/strength imbalances of the muscles involved in Upper Crossed Syndrome.

To ensure you get the best possible results, make sure that you get treatment from a certified Master Myoskeletal Therapist (MMT). A list of practitioners trained in Myoskeletal Alignment Techniques can be found at: <https://erikdalton.com/find-a-certified-therapist/>

## References

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# What Can Myoskeletal Therapy Do for You?

1. Relieve chronic pain contributing to weak posture
2. Release trapped nerves from tight muscles, joints and ligaments
3. Correct atrophy, weakness and muscle amnesia in head-forward postures
4. Address breathing disorders caused by a drooping ribcage
5. Lessen pain sensitivity through graded exposure assisted stretching
6. Eliminate protective muscle guarding due to joint dysfunction
7. Improve sleep by lowering sympathetic nervous system tone
8. Create dynamic, confident posture with innovative restorative techniques
9. Correct sports-related tendon and joint injuries
10. Enhance athletic performance through hands-on proprioceptive training
11. Change the brain's mind about pain through targeted exercise advice
12. Prevent chronic neck and back pain due to tension, trauma & weak posture

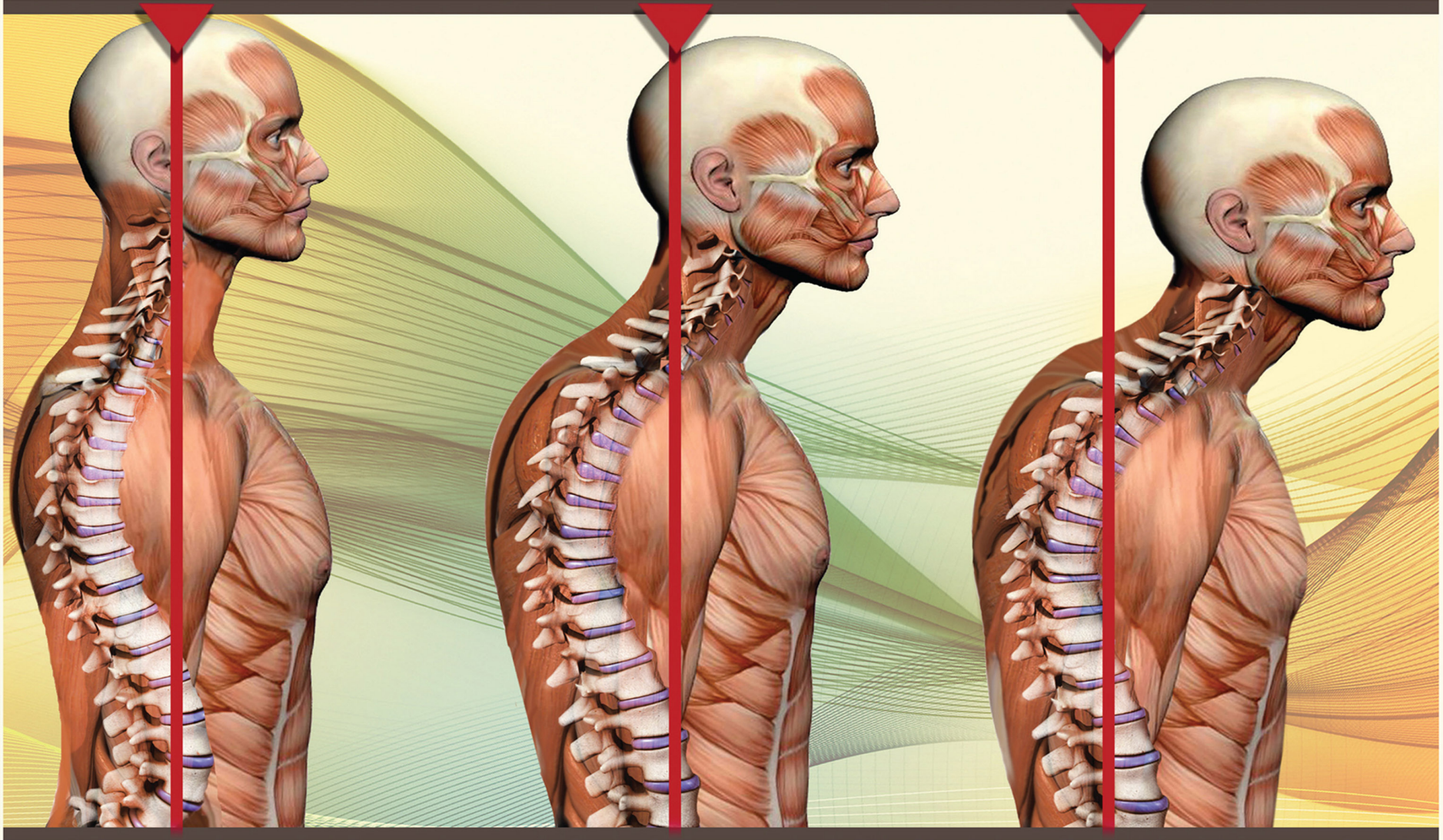
**Stand tall, move better and experience less pain...  
*the Myoskeletal way!***

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12 lbs.

32 lbs.

42 lbs.



NORMAL POSTURE

2 INCHES FORWARD

3 INCHES FORWARD

## 42 Pound Head

*“For every inch of Forward Head Posture, the weight of the head on the spine increases by an additional 10 Pounds.”*

Rene Calliet, MD, “Soft Tissue Pain and Disability”

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