

Physical exercise, wellness and posture in the old age

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“Is it possible to get old without becoming shorter, stiff, hunched, but keeping the body and its functions efficient?”

Every day we meet old people and what we notice in them is just what affects us: their white hair, their awkward posture, the way they walk or drag themselves. When we meet a person we have not seen for a long time, the effects of time are even more visible to us and our mind makes comparisons and thoughts like “How old he is!”... “He does not seem like the person I used to know anymore”... “Am I as old and changed as he is?”. Instead people we see every day do not seem to get old so quickly. That is because the signs of the time and postural alterations become something we are used to. Everything seems “almost normal” and we do not notice anything. Yet time goes by for everyone and we all get old.

What are the first visible signs showing us that time has really gone by? We can easily notice that we are more hunched, awkward and shorter. We can observe whether our walk is still determined and vigorous as it was when we were younger or it is more insecure, prudent, heavy, slow, arduous. Joint pain lead people to more cautious, reduced and slow movements. The whole posture changes, the ability to adapt and to move decreases. The ancient saying “Movement is life and life is movement” reminds us that the body needs to have specific features. If these features are missing, also a vigorous body can become weak and fragile.

When physical skills slowly reduce during the years, people do not notice it until a problem occurs and they realize they are not able to face it as they would have done in the past.

Also the way of thinking and the clarity of thought change. We can say that both body posture and “mind posture” change year after year. Here is one of the most complete definitions of Posture:

“...Posture is the expression of an inherited past, a personal past, of cultural formation and deformation, memories coming from physical and emotional traumas (the so called emotional cysts), the kind of life, sport, work and stress we live; posture is the way we breath, the way we stand, move and interact with ourselves and with others. Our posture is the expression of our history.” (D. Raggi, 1998)

Here are some aspects of our organism that modify and make us become “old”.

The speed of our cells, our will to do, motor coordination, food assimilation and ability to use oxygen reduce.

Tissues and inner organs become more delicate and their functions slow down if intervertebral discs get dehydrated and therefore thinner. This is the reason why many people experience a 3-6 mm reduction in their height. Teeth represent a serious matter, too. People often lose their teeth due to caries or periodontal diseases, so they start wearing dentures. Visual and auditive perceptions are reduced. The heart gets tired more easily, arteries become stiffer, blood pressure rises and blood-vessels become more fragile. Breath becomes more stressed. Hair becomes hoary and many people get bald. Skin becomes puckered. Memory is not as good as it used to be once. Sex is not vigorous anymore or people even stop having it. Menopause produces in many cases mood alterations. The risk of contracting dangerous diseases rises with age, etc.

The list is long and unpleasant but this should not discourage you. Instead, it should encourage everybody to slow down the aging process. There are some simple but important rules to turn the “black list” into a positive list. Look at those 70/80-year old people who still live like they were 40. The human body tends to loose part of its faculties, but if you activate them every day they will stay efficient. If you stop using them you will lose them quickly. It is therefore possible for the body to live till the end in good physical and mental state. Of course, the spirit with which you live your life is crucial. Some 40-year old people are depressed and their organism adapt to their mood: hunched, heavier, slow, tired... As if they were 80 years old! It is no doubt that everything should start from the emotional sphere and extend to the physical one. It is difficult to ask a sad or depressed person to do physical activity or sport and to enjoy it.

Nowadays it is sure that a lot can be done to make old age better than we used to believe.

Here is what people can do to create balance and to keep our complex system more functional.

The fundamental elements are: the psychic part (emotions, harmony, stress, serenity), the chemical part (food, water, air), the structural part (posture). How is this true?



Everybody knows that without food people can live for a maximum of 40-55 days and without water people live for 20-40 days. Without sleeping the nervous system breaks down after a while and energies are not recovered. Without breathing people can live for a maximum of 2-4 minutes and with no heartbeats just for 1-2 minutes. Without psychic and emotional activity people are quickly likely to reach a sort of vegetal state. All these functions are essential, so how is it possible to keep them active?

Nutrition plays a very important role in this sense: cells grow, develop and multiply just thanks to the energy coming from food. That is why the quality of the food we eat is fundamental for cells health. If the food we introduce is inadequate, any other precautions and ways to keep the body healthy will probably result useless. Fresh, natural and non-processed food, in a proper amount and with a preference for vegetables, is a good choice.

Also drinking enough is important, especially water, which constitutes 60-70% of our body. It is thanks to the presence of water that all cellular functions can take place. Breathing as much as possible in the open air and doing physical activity every day, for instance walking quite fast, can be useful, to produce some fatigue to stimulate heart and lungs. It is not advisable to push too much running or cycling for hours. Not only is it unnecessary, but it can be dangerous as well.



**Quantity does not mean quality,
but it is quality that can lead to quantity...
Of wellness... of will to do... of longevity.**

The best activities according to this point of view seem to be long-step walking level or in the hills. Long bicycle rides and some pleasant swimming. Frequent exposure to daylight and moderate exposure to sun, which means going out in the daylight as much as you can instead of staying at home indoors. Respecting the sleeping need and going to bed before 11 p.m. . Keeping your sight, hearing and mental faculties fit through everyday readings, intellectual and cultural activities. Dedicating to social services or activities that can be truly useful for yourselves and for others. Rest, serenity, will to live and important commitments supply a goal to live for. Using as little drugs as possible with no medical prescription or indiscriminately. Doing everyday joint-mobility exercises for the vertebral column and

any other joint. The exercises should be mild, but have to last for some minutes. Anyway, we will deal with this at the end of the article. Too many muscular tensions can affect, stiffen and irritate the joints, causing any kind of postural alteration, pain and chronic tiredness. Moreover, these problems lead to bad mood and steal people's vitality and will to live.

Appropriate postural exercises can keep in good shape many aspects of our system: more plasticity of the tissues, more muscular resistance, more articular elasticity, more calcium availability, less pain and the organs are more available to external mechanical and energetic relations.

Most of the musculoskeletal disorders are connected to tensions, muscular retractions and therefore lack of movement.

According to many authors, postural and articular problems can reach with their tensions also internal organs, affecting their delicate functions.

Let's talk about old age under a postural perspective.

The way old people walk, move, bend, rise, breath, is a clear sign of a neglected and now help-needing posture.

Evidence shows that every postural global activity (we will deal with this later), can produce benefits in any musculo-articular disorder at any age. It can lighten articular load and improve life quality.

In our practice we use a very simple but natural and efficient method called Global Non-Compensated Muscular Stretching. It relieves joints from tensions and pain, conferring discouraged people a new will to live.

Therefore, anybody can do something to improve their condition. The picture shows there is no age limit to improve.



Why do people bend losing height centimeters and get that stiff?

The responsible for postural problems is the Tonic Postural System, which action is related to many factors: stress, fears, wearing strains, wrong postures, inactivity, traumas, scars, malocclusion, breathing problems, etc. .

The TPS is a complex system which tries, in its own way, to make the musculo-articular system work, but which cannot manage disturbing information such as stress, wrong postures, traumas, etc. When they come up, all it does is increasing tensions and stiffness as a defense. After some time, however, this leads to musculo-articular stiffness problems, pain and chronic tiredness. People do not notice it at the beginning, since they adapt to it day after day. Eventually they realize they are not the same person they were “some” years ago anymore. It becomes impossible to do what they used to do easily: do their shoes up, cut their toe nails, touch the ground bending forward, make a small leap, reach up to the high shelves, climb up the stairs, cycling, do long walks, etc.

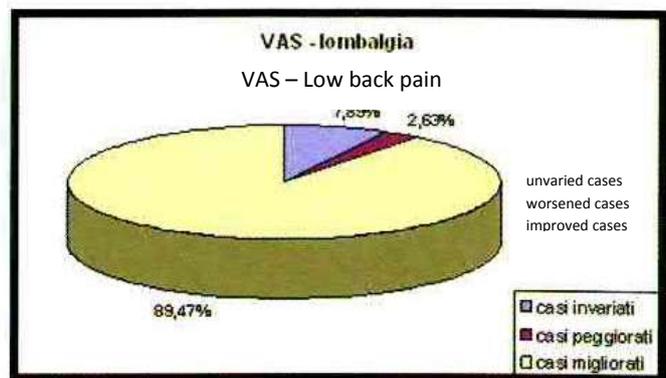
Let’s now focus on the results of a research we carried out in our practice in collaboration with Università La Sapienza of Rome. We treated 38 patients, who were on average 58.5 years old (some were more than 70). 15 of them were males, that is the 39.5%, and 23 of them were women, that is the 60.5%.

The average duration of the low back pain they were suffering from was of 15.4 years (some of them had it continuously for 20 years). The patients underwent ten sessions of postural rebalance, once a week, through our method of global non-compensated muscular stretching. Also all the other pathologies they had were kept into consideration in order to see how they would change during the treatment. Apart from low back pain, there were cervical pain (38% of the cases), arm pain (14% of the cases) and metatarsus pain (13% of the cases). Evaluation scales used in the scientific international community were adopted: the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS), the Quebec Back Disability Scale (QBPDS) and the Present Pain Intensity Index (PPI). We measured mobility and flexibility through electronic systems such as stabilometric and baropodometric platform, etc.

Due to space issues it is not possible to present all the tests we did and the related graphics, but we can say that all patients improved from all points of view and in all the pathologies they had.

We demonstrated therefore in many ways

that it is possible to get an improvement in case of classical pathologies such as cervical pain, low back pain, lumbo-sciatic pain, protrusions, slipped disc, hyperkyphosis, hyperlordosis, peri-arthritis, tunnel



carpal syndrome, coxalgias, gonalgias, metatarsalgia, hallux valgo, tendinitis, bursitis, capsulitis, etc. can improve considerably or even be solved completely.

Here is an example of the exercises used in this research project (see photo below).

With global non-compensated muscular stretching, never acting on the pain, which is considered only as an effect, we look for the real cause, that is the origin of people's pain. To do it, we operate with a



particular data collection on patients' pain history, the postural analysis made by the therapist-posturologist with the help of computerized tools and functional kinesiology tests of the movement.

Once we found the "irritative thorn" causing the pain and postural alteration, we work directly on it through exercises and specific compensation-free postures. They operate on muscular chains and diaphragm retractions in order to

rebalance muscular tensions and consequently they help obtain less stiff and compressed joints. The whole postural alignment will improve and pain will disappear.

At any age it is therefore possible to regain postural functionality and harmony recovering will to live and to do and also some centimeters of height.

For more information on the Raggi Method®- Pancafit® please address to Posturalmed S.A.

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