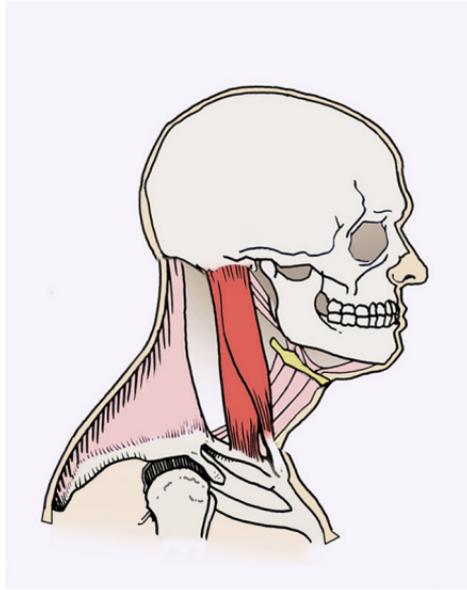


# Your Forward Head Posture

Selected Blog Posts from [blog.corewalking.com](http://blog.corewalking.com)

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by Jonathan FitzGordon

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## What is posture?

The instructions that I offer people to change their posture are most often the opposite directions that they have heard for their whole life. Chest up and shoulders back as a postural instruction should be a thing of the past as it is one of the major culprits leading so many of us towards forward head posture. Experiencing the CoreWalking program is taking a leap of faith into counter intuitive learning that might well change your body and life forever.

Ask yourself this—where have all the posture instructions you have heard led you. If you downloaded this eBook it is likely that you have forward head posture and maybe even some pain and tension issues. Maybe throwing out the old rule book and trying something new will be worth your while.

The human body can be broken down into any number of systems that all work together to make it run. In terms of movement we are looking at three of these systems; the skeletal system, the muscular system, and the nervous system. If well aligned, these three components team up to create well-oiled machine. If not well aligned, well, you get 99% of the population.

The skeletal system consists of somewhere around three hundred bones at birth but by the time we are fully grown many small bones have joined together to

create bigger ones so that an adult has 206 bones. The bones are connected to each other through ligaments and the muscles are connected to the bones through tendons. The bones have a number of uses but their main function is to hold us up.

Muscles move us. There are three different kinds of muscle- skeletal, cardiac, and smooth. All three involve movement. Smooth and cardiac muscle produce involuntary movement of the heart and organs. Skeletal muscles are under our conscious control and they determine how the body moves through space. Skeletal system muscles all work in pairs with the aid of surrounding muscles. To move well these pairs need to be well balanced. To be well balanced the bones need to be properly aligned.

Nerves tell the muscles to move the bones. The nervous system, like muscle, has voluntary and involuntary divisions but in terms of moving through space we are mostly calling on voluntary nerve pathways to execute both simple and complex actions. In terms of good walking pattern, as the body falls forward through space the brain tells the psoas muscle (the body's main hip flexor) to lift the leg and move it forward. The central nervous system consists of the brain and spinal cord with the spinal cord housed in the center of the spine with all of the body's peripheral nerves emanating from it.

The complex interplay of the skeletal system, the muscular system and the nervous system determines the quality of our movement patterns. While the nerves tell the muscles to move the bones, if the bones aren't aligned properly and the muscles aren't correctly balanced the nerves will not pass freely through the spine for efficient function. So the work is to align the bones and balance the muscles so that the nerves are given the clearest pathway to do their thing.

Forward head posture, a highly common form of misalignment impacts all three of these systems. A great deal of our movement stems from the eyes and their relationship to the world around us. Only one nerve in the whole body connects directly into the brain and central nervous system—the optic nerve. And only one set of muscles communicate with the eyes—the sub occipitals (photos to follow), found directly below the base of the skull where the head meets the spine.

These muscles are profoundly impacted by forward head posture and have a mitigating effect on the body's ability to perform optimally. Forward head posture is most often the result of other imbalances that manifest in the head but the consequences, as you read in the following blog posts, can be extreme.

## Why Walking

Above all the CoreWalking program aims to change the alignment of your pelvis to facilitate many positive changes in the body. Many people tuck their pelvis (another of those age old but incorrect instructions) and allow their thigh bones to lean forward against the hip sockets. This in turn pulls the upper spine backwards forcing the head forward to compensate resulting in—forward head posture.

The CoreWalking Program teaches posture as well as movement. Learning how to stand correctly is extremely difficult and we find that teaching people how to stand through improving movement patterns is highly effective.

Walking is one of the more fundamental aspects of our lives and most people tend to take it for granted. If you change that one detail and start paying attention to how you walk and change it for the better, you might well be amazed with the results and your forward head might begin to settle backwards over time.

## Where's Your Head At?

Posted on November 26, 2013 at 7:03 am



Where's your head at? is something I am asking my clients all the time. Our perception of ourselves in space is endlessly fascinating to me and my work amuses me to no end. It is amazingly fun to teach people how to walk—



and help them out of pain or improve their quality of life or athletic performance.

When I teach yoga I very often start off class by standing people up in what I consider to be correct posture. And as I do that I simply wait for the reaction that is always some non-verbal version of, "No possible way is that standing up straight."

From my perspective everybody leans back and tucks their pelvis under which is not good but as a result their head is often situated in a fairly decent place. This is different for some as many people are tighter in the sub occipital muscles at the base of the neck than others, and these people will never have a level head.

But for the most part people have poor posture with a decently situated head. When I put them into my version of good posture, the answer to where's

your head at? is—forward—because everything else is in the right place.

This might seem strange and as usual I will add my caveat that I might be wrong, but I do this with a lot of people every week and the same thing happens. The overwhelming majority of people have their thighs forward, their pelvis pulled under, the trunk leaning backwards and their head on relatively straight and level.

When I stand them up correctly their head moves forward in space so that even if everything else in the body is well organized—shoulders, hips, knees and ankles all in a line—they will feel like they are falling forward because their head has been thrust forward more than usual.

When I tell them to go back to “old you” they breathe a sigh of relief because their head moves back to where it feels normal though everything below the neck is sacrificed to find that feeling. The biggest issue is that correcting this will not happen in an instant. Tight muscles in the neck and often the lower back will not allow for changes above and below the neck to happen all at once.

Where’s your head at? Take some pictures to find out and feel free to send them to me for analysis. You might be shocked at what you see.

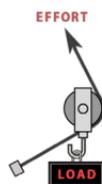
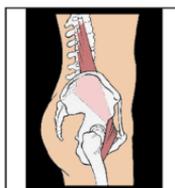
## Sub Occipital Muscles, a Tucked Pelvis and the Psoas

Posted on November 15, 2013 at 6:38 am



The sub occipital muscles are directly affected by a tucked pelvis. This post is a follow-up and something of a rehash of the one earlier in the week— The Rhomboids, a Tucked Pelvis and the Psoas. In truth there is a much more literal connection between the psoas and the rhomboids and the relationship that they have connecting the legs and shoulder girdle to the spine, but the sub occipital muscles are likewise affected by a tucked pelvis.

The psoas works as a pulley system within the body. One of its essential functions is to provide support to the uplifting spine. It does this pretty much any time there is a successful arch in the lumbar (lower) spine. The spine has four curves in order to successfully transfer weight from the head to the legs. If the spine were straight instead of curved it would be impossible to support the very heavy weight of the head on top of the shoulders and the pelvis.



The lumbar spine is most responsible for bearing and transferring this weight. That is why the five bones of the lumbar spine are bigger than the rest of the vertebrae, and though they can flex and extend, they can't rotate. Their size and stability are designed for carrying the load of the upper body.

The four sub occipital muscles connect the head to the very top of the spine—the first two vertebrae (C1 & C2), the atlas and the axis—extend, rotate and tilt the head. But they can only really accomplish these functions if the head sits directly on top of the spine. When the head is forced forward these muscles are basically holding on for dear life which is why they very often become full of tension that can lead to profound discomfort.

The effect of the psoas and a tucked pelvis on the support of the head and sub occipital muscles is one of the easiest things to feel. Assuming that you are sitting as you read this (and I hate to say it but I am assuming that you are sitting badly, though I hope I am wrong), deepen your groins, sticking the butt out a little, bringing a small arch into the lower back. This basic action should support the head bringing it slightly back in space without your needing to do anything else.

Now tuck the pelvis rounding the lower back slightly and feel what happens to the head. If I had to guess it moved forward as the upper back rounded a bit. A tucked pelvis eliminates the lumbar curve which removes the spinal support for the head forcing it forward into space.

Sitting standing and walking correctly are essential to having a head situated happily in space, and sub occipital muscles that can work according to their design. Developing support for your head by properly aligning a tucked pelvis and activating the pulley system of the psoas can have far reaching effects that can include sinus problems, headaches and chronic neck and shoulder strain.

## Me and My Forward Head

Posted on November 12, 2013 at 7:01 am



My forward head drives me crazy. It stubbornly refuses to go backwards and stay there.

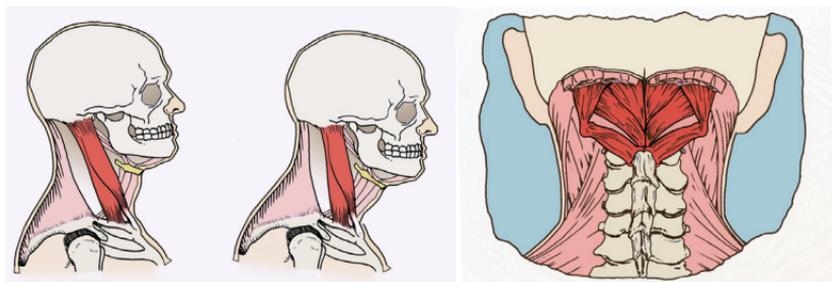
After giving a talk about the psoas muscle at my local library this past weekend someone in attendance came up to me and told me he could fix my head if I was interested. This followed an hour and a half of me talking to people about how they needed to change their posture so to say I was a little taken a back is an understatement.

The problem of course is that he is right about my forward head and I forced myself to listen and act politely as he began to manipulate my cranium and neck to get it into the right position.

My forward head has been one of the main issues in a long line of body issues I have worked on. About eight years ago I went through the Rolwing series with Brooke Thomas and this was a life changing experience for me.

I have been going to rock concerts since I was a wee lad and my standard routine had always been to make it through the first couple of songs before I began to feel a familiar ache at the base of my skull as the space

between my head and neck began to throb. The next thing to happen was my elbows went wide out to the side and my thumbs began to dig into the ridiculously tight head and neck muscles that drove me batty.



And then my friends and people around me would complain about my elbows being in their way. A number of months after I was Rolfed I was at a concert and noticed that my familiar ache was not readily apparent.

One of the things I tell people about my CoreWalking Program is that it succeeds in the negative which is a nonsensical statement. The idea is that there will never be a—eureka! moment when all aches and pains disappear. But six months down the line you might be walking around and notice, “Hey, that ankle pain that has bedeviled me for three years is no longer there”.

My forward head is very attached to me (a little yoga comedy) and doesn't want to go away. I know it is there because when I make videos for the blog the position of my head, neck and chin is about all I can

focus on. The picture in this paragraph is from a video I will posting in the next day or two about Tree Pose. It is consternating to say the least.

If I pay attention when I am in yoga class, which isn't a given, I will always notice that my head is slightly forward of my spine. There is movement available for me to properly align it but very pigheadedly does not want to stay in place.

This imbalance concerns my sub occipital muscles as well as my sternocleidomastoid muscles and while so much else has changed in my body as I have improved my posture and walking patterns, they cling to the old me and don't want to shift into a new reality.

I am patient and can probably work on it a little harder. When I drive I try to always remember to keep my head back and long on the headrest, and when I type— like now— I work to make sure that my head rests above my shoulders and spine.

But it is a lifelong effort and might well take another five years, if I ever get it right. That is a hard pill to swallow but I can't and won't give up.

## I Hate To Say It But You Have Terrible Posture

Posted on October 24, 2013 at 2:04 pm



I had a great CoreWalking session with someone yesterday who presented all of the usual traits of terrible posture that I hope to curb in my clients. Feet too wide apart and turned out, pelvis tucked under, thighs thrust forward, front ribs flared, shoulders aligned behind the hips. And his head was on fairly straight.

At the end of the session which I think went well, after we left the room, he turned back to me.

“Just one question.” He said.

““Shoot.”

“Everyone tells me I have great posture. I mean everyone.”

“Well, I hate to say it but you have terrible posture.”

He laughed and we parted ways.

This brings up two issues.

1. For whatever reason, our world perceives your basic military posture of chest lifted and shoulders thrown back as being good posture. It is deeply ingrained in our culture that this is the correct way to stand. And it is my humble opinion that it isn't.

2. If everyone has bad posture—and I would put that in the 90% range of the population—what is the benchmark for perceiving good posture?

Maybe I am wrong. I am, have been and will continue to be wrong about many things in life. What can you do? That being said, most of what I offer is pretty basic. The simplest of all the cues I give people involves the breath.

Breathing is a whole body experience. When we inhale the entire trunk should be involved with the diaphragm muscle dropping down to push the belly out and pull air into the lungs. This basic approach to breathing can't really happen with bad posture. If the pelvis tucks under or the front ribs lift up the breath will go somewhere but it won't likely fill the whole trunk.

I offer an endless array of cues to help people change their posture but the truth is a great many people think they have good posture already. The first step to changing is to honestly assess how you stand. Good luck.

# Dowager's Hump Or Kyphotic Upper Back

Posted on September 5, 2013 at 8:22 am



Dowager's hump—I love the sound of it for some reason. A dowager is a widow who owns her deceased husbands property. Dowager's hump is the name given to an extremely rounded upper back (thoracic spine). Many people ascribe the cause of a dowager's hump to osteoporosis which is a bone disorder due to a loss of bone mass and density. People with osteoporosis have an increased risk of fractures among other things. And micro fractures of the upper spine can easily lead to the abnormal rounding referred to as dowager's hump.

Kyphosis is the normal outward rounding of the upper back just as lordosis is the normal inward curve of the lower back. Unfortunately both of these terms have come to be associated with a negative connotation. They are only bad when the curves are greater than normal. In the same way that scoliosis can be measured in terms of the degree in the bend of the spine from side to side, a normal kyphosis becomes excessive past a certain degree of curve from front to

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back. Dowager's hump is merely a dramatic name for excessively kyphotic upper back.

So whether we call it dowager's hump or an excessive kyphosis it is important to figure out a way to finding better alignment for our spine. Osteoporosis afflicts so many people, mostly women of a certain age, and studies (Particularly the work of Dr. Loren Fishman) have shown that a daily yoga practice can increase bone density. But osteoporosis isn't the only way to get a dowager's hump.

An excessive kyphosis is also a sign of a poorly aligned pelvis and imbalanced or weak abdominal muscles. I am proof positive of this assertion. I have always had a very rounded upper back that only became manageable when i changed my posture for the better and built a very solid bunch of core muscles. Even so, if you look at me from the side, my upper back still rounds a bit too much forcing my head forward. I can bring the head back in line which gives the appearance of decreasing my dowagers hump but not by much and it takes a lot of effort to do it.

Change is possible for anyone. If you want to change your posture you can. If you want to build new or different muscle tone you can. It is not necessarily easy but it is not brain surgery either; it is merely pavlovian repetition that takes longer for some than

others but is available to everyone.

But it takes a plan. You need to honestly assess your posture (easier said than done), and then devise a series of exercises to obsess on for a while as you bring change to a stubborn body, and some bodies are more stubborn than others. And you should probably learn how to walk correctly.

Yesterday's exercise to develop the rhomboids is one way to begin to bring change to the upper back and in the next week or so I will provide some additional exercises. Changing the body doesn't happen through osmosis—it takes time, energy and dedication. I honestly can't believe the changes I have brought to my own structure but I am not kidding when I say that it has been a fifteen year process and counting...

## Good Posture And Your Forward Head

Posted on June 26, 2013 at 8:00 am



Tucked Under

Good posture is a rare and wonderful thing; your forward head posture is not. From my perspective everyone tucks their pelvis under which sends the thigh bones forward and the upper body backwards. While this isn't good posture it tends to leave the head fairly well situated on top of it all (Left picture). Perception wise this seems important for the brain as I think most bad posture comes about to accommodate a head needing to feel "correctly aligned".

When I put someone into the posture that I want them to work towards (getting the legs under the hips), the head is often thrust even more forward past the line of the shoulders and out into space. This doesn't look



Forward Head

any better than it feels. The forward head is situated so because of a lifetime of bad posture and imbalanced muscle tone left a skeleton that can't support being put into the correct place. Getting the legs under the hips and untucking the pelvis often pulls tight lower back muscles into tight relief for which the upper back compensates backwards as the head moves forward. Over the long haul anyone can change this environment but it

will take a good deal of time and conscious effort.



Not Bad

As a concept this might seem odd—good skeletal alignment messes up the head while bad posture allows the head to sit on straight—but the brain requires a certain feeling of normalcy. Keeping the head in a decent place at the expense of the rest of your posture serves the brain but nothing else as we make our way through life.

Take some time to assess your posture honestly and start working on the many little things you can do to change it.

## Poor Posture Headaches

Posted on May 17, 2013 at 7:49 am.



A ridiculous amount of people suffer from headaches. The numbers if they are to be believed are unfathomable. According to the National Headache Foundation, via Web MD, over 45 million Americans suffer from chronic, recurring headaches and of these, 28 million suffer from migraine.

There are as many as 150 classifications of headaches on record. Poor posture headaches can be directly related and these fall into the category of tension headaches which are the most common form of headache for adults.

A happy head sits directly on top of the spine immediately above the shoulders. In this type of posture the muscles of the head and neck can be aligned and balanced. Forward head posture which plagues almost everybody, forces the head to move past the shoulders throwing off intrinsic relationships within the body. This particularly limits the ability of the bones to provide structural support. This imbalance is why so many people get tension headaches.

Even though you get a head ache, it is the pelvis that is responsible. Our societies habitually tucked pelvis forces the head forward causing the tension that

often lead to both poor posture headaches.

For the head to sit on top of the spine correctly, the pelvis needs to sit in a similar fashion above the legs. The spine should be stacked directly in line with the femur bones of the leg and when the pelvis tucks under this relationship flies out the window.

I have to admit that when I started to teaching people to walk it was a bit of a lark and something to add to my yoga teaching. As I proceeded and saw the far reaching results that changing movement pattern brought to people I made walking my primary focus. Just last week a client mentioned to me how his headaches have diminished and he is not the first one.

Here is a testimonial:

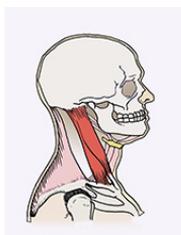
*Insanely clever about the body, Jonathan took all the things I was learning in yoga about the physiology of movement and taught me how to integrate them into my everyday life—by re-teaching me how to walk. Highly intuitive about movement, CoreWalking is part of the reason I have many fewer headaches.*

**Janet Johnson**

Change your walk, change your life.

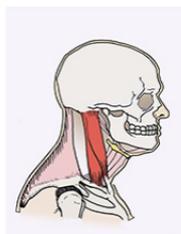
## Forward Head Posture: The SCM and the Trapezius Muscles

Posted on March 26, 2012 at 11:15 am.



Today we will look at a classic area of imbalance between muscles at the front and the back of the neck. A muscle at the front of the throat tilts and rotates your head – the sternocleidomastoid muscle, a big rope that connects your head (the mastoid), with the rib cage and shoulder girdle (the sternum and the clavicle).

We have a massive diamond shaped muscle on our back that stabilizes the shoulder blades on the back and aids in assorted movements of the blades—the trapezius, connected at the bases of the head, on either shoulder and much of the thoracic spine. All movements of the shoulder blade involve the trapezius in some way or another and it has some minor involvement with tilting and turning of the head.



The shoulder girdle hangs from these two muscles along with the omohyoid (considering the hyoid bone as part of the head). The shoulder girdle should be suspended above the rib cage. Neither the collar bones or the shoulder blades are meant to be in contact with the ribcage.

Forward head posture throws the relationship of these two muscles into disarray. When the head moves forward the spine goes with it. This pulls the shoulder blades forward as well, not only to they make contact with the upper ribcage, they begin to pull the ribcage forward as well.

The sternocleidomastoid muscle that should be involved in turning and nodding your head, instead is called upon to hold the head up in space. As a result the trapezius becomes largely responsible for turning and nodding the head.

Try to feel the difference of the two actions in your muscles.

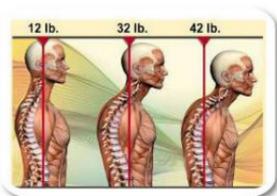
- Let the head fall even more forward than usual and turn and nod the head.
- See if you feel that the muscular sensation of turning is generated from the back of the neck.
- Now pull the sides of the neck back, lengthen the ears back and up. What happens when you turn and nod your head here?

Ideally the focus of the effort changes from the back of the neck to the front of the throat where it should come from.

Forward head posture throws off a number of key relationships in the body and for us the main culprit for forward head posture is a tucked pelvis and poor abdominal tone.

## Forward Head Posture and Core Tone

Posted on March 24, 2012 at 12:19 pm.



Forward head posture is the most common postural misalignment. The ears are supposed to be aligned over the shoulders which are supposed to be over the hips, knee, and ankles—in one straight line. What usually occurs is the shoulders lean back behind the hips, the pelvis tucks under forcing the leg forward and often the shin back.

The odd thing is that the head is often on relatively straight. When I stand people up in my version of straight everything will line up but the head, which is thrust forward in space. I believe that this has something to do with everyone's chronically poor posture—we lack the muscle tone to keep the head well aligned and instead allow for an assortment of skeletal dysfunctions to create the illusion of a well oriented head.

For the head to sit successfully on top of the spine with shoulder girdle hanging from it and not dragging on the rib cage—we need a great deal of core tone, specifically in the abdominals. There is not a lot of bony structure between the pelvis and the rib cage, just the five lumbar bones, so these muscles need to provide a great deal of support if we want to have a stable trunk and avoid forward head posture.

The curve of the lower back exists in order to bear the weight of the spine above it. The stability of the lumbar curve is dependent on the tone of surrounding muscles and the muscle that most supports the lumbar spine is the transverse abdominus. It is not the only muscle to support the spine but it is one that gets a lot of my attention.

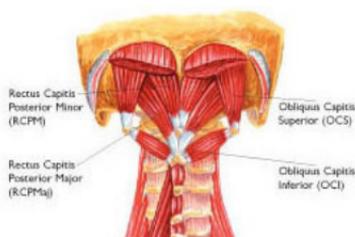
If you are sitting as you read this here is a simple way to feel how core tone impacts the position of the head

- If you are not already, tuck your pelvis under and let your lower back round.
- Feel the head and try to gently rotate it back and up, lengthening from the back of the neck.
- Now, sit up tall and bring a curve into your lumbar spine if you can.
- Do a gentle lift of your pelvic floor.
- Add tone in your lower belly by drawing your navel gently to the spine.
- Feel the head and try to gently rotate it back and up, lengthening from the back of the neck.

Ideally if felt a lot easier to move the head into a better position when the core was engaged. Any work we can do to avoid or mitigate forward head posture is worth the effort though the journey can be long and hard.

# The Sub Occipital Muscles and Forward Head Posture

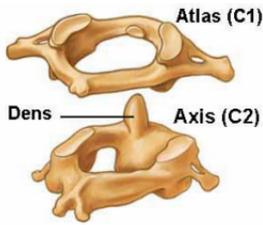
Posted on December 22, 2011 at 7:28 pm.



Where is your head as you read this sentence? Is it reaching forward towards the computer monitor or is it back in line with the rest of the spine? If the ears are forward of the shoulders as the eyes reach for the screen the availability of spinal support disappears.

Forward head posture is the most common misalignment that I encounter. Below is a review of the muscles that support the head:

The sub occipital muscles, as the name suggests, are muscles located below the occipital bone. These muscles are the storage center for a great deal of the head and neck tension that so many people feel. They are rectus capitis posterior major and minor & obliquus capitis inferior & superior; one on each side makes a total of eight muscles. The sub occipital muscles connect the head to the spine through two bones at the top of the spine that are vertebrae but very different from the rest of the spinal vertebrae. These bones are called the atlas and the axis.



The atlas is the bone at the top of the spine and the axis sits directly below the atlas. These two bones allow a greater range of motion than normal vertebrae and are responsible, with the help of the sub occipitals, for extending and rotating the upper spine and the head. The brain stem extends all the way down to the axis connecting these structures to the brain and nervous system.

These muscles will only work as designed if our head is successfully on top of the spine. The suboccipital muscles have a number of significant features that set them apart from other muscles. They are the only muscles that are directly connected to the eyes. When your eyes receive information about space and movement, this information is related to the sub occipital muscles and then from the sub occipitals to the rest of the spine. These exchanges happen with every step you take.

The suboccipital muscles are also the only muscles in the body that are directly connected to the spinal cord. The rectus capitus posterior minor, actually sends its connective fibers into the dura matter, a protective layer surrounding the brain and the spinal cord.

Start watching heads and where they are in space.

The ears are meant to live back in line with the shoulders and the chin and eye sockets are meant to be level to the ground. The unfortunate tendency is for the head to be forward of the ears and the chin and eye sockets to be slightly elevated.

If this is your posture your body is not in a place to perform at optimal capacity. All of the walking and core work we do is to try and reverse this common misalignment.

What is going on at the back of your neck? Relieving tension and stress in the suboccipital muscles is key to making permanent changes to our movement patterns.

## **Change Your Walk, Change Your Life**

Changing the way you walk and stand can have far reaching effects but you will never know it till you try it. Giving CoreWalking a try might well change you forever, and the truth is you can always revert to the old you anytime you want. Though we believe, and we know from experience, once you get accustomed to the new you, you won't want to go back.

For more information go to:

<http://CoreWalking.com>