
The Anatomy of Posture

At 84, Lilian Jarvis shares her secret to better health



Photo by Trinity Wheeler Photography

Why Posture matters...

Somatic Stretch® is about getting your body to work as well as it possibly can. So what does that mean?

It means two things: That your body works *easily and comfortably* from a physical viewpoint and *in health and wellness* physiologically, and that it supports itself against the constant pull of gravity with a combined feeling of strength and ease.

These two viewpoints are based on body mechanics and structure. **On the body mechanics side**, our bodies are like machines. They're made up of separate parts that move through the action of pulleys and levers, which in our bodies are our muscles and joints. And those pulleys and levers have to work smoothly and easily, as they do in machines to save wear and tear on them. And they have to work so we don't need to use a whole lot of energy to move ourselves, either from one place to another, or in moving the separate parts of our bodies, as we do with exercises and sports, for example.



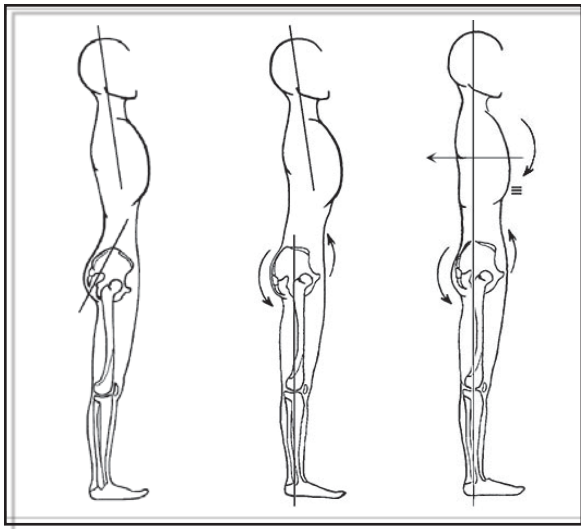
You've heard the expression, "oiled joints." Well, our bodies need to move as though our joints are oiled. And that means that our muscles have to be "loose," or supple, so we're not all tied up with tight, tense muscles that make it difficult to move easily.



On the structural side, our bodies are like buildings. They have an inner framework, which is our bone structure. With buildings, the framework is built on plumb lines, which means that the walls of the ground floor are one hundred percent vertically aligned, so all the floors above, however many there are, go straight up.

And why is this important? Well, if walls start to lean sideways, gravity takes hold and begins to pull the building downward. And that creates structural strain; floors get sloped, windows and doors don't close properly and cracks appear in the walls. Over time, if it isn't trussed up or repairs made, the whole building starts to degenerate and ultimately collapses.

In the same way, our framework has to be vertically aligned and sufficiently supported so gravity doesn't drag us downward and cause structural strain in us. In our bodies, it shows up as aches



and pains, and, when we don't take steps to correct what's causing them, it can lead to injuries, poor health and illness.

The ground floor of our bodies is the pelvis, and, like the ground floor of buildings, it needs to be straight in order for the parts above it to be straight. A straight pelvis means that you don't have an excessively arched back, or swayback, as it's commonly called, nor a back that is flat, with the pelvis tipped backward. Neither is good; a swayback is usually the first place where structural strain shows up—as an aching back—and a flat back puts a downward pull on the back

which strains it in a different way. Once we get the pelvis straight, with the rib cage, neck and head aligned above it, body weight is supported by the bone structure, taking the pressure off the muscles and other soft tissue and so relieving them of strain.

The legs, too, have to be properly aligned so no strain falls on the ankles, knees and hip joints. And total body weight must be supported.

Although structural alignment is the same for our bodies as in buildings, there's a big difference between *support* in buildings and support for our bodies. Support in buildings comes from the construction materials, like concrete and steel. Our bodies don't have that advantage; they aren't made of concrete and steel and our joints aren't welded together; they're connected by soft tissue that allows the parts of our bodies to move in isolation. And that means they can go *out* of alignment. So, to support our bodies in proper alignment, we need certain muscles to be strong enough to *hold* the parts in alignment and to keep our body *weight* holding "up" against the constant pull of gravity.

In this abbreviated version of the Somatic Stretch® training program, you will get the main exercises that, first of all, will help you release tension and stretch out muscles so you can move the parts of your body more easily. You will also learn how to "find" the muscles that will help you to straighten your pelvis, flatten your stomach and support your back. This won't all happen right away. When holding patterns have existed for many years, exercises need to be done over a period of time before the patterns of tightness begin to release. Once learned, the exercises can be used either for further improvement or as basic maintenance to keep the essential movement areas of the body mobile.

So, move gently! As long as you listen to your body and avoid any 'sharp' sensations, you'll be drawing blood and nutrients into areas that will return the favor with freer movement, an uplifting sense of vitality and an impressive posture that maintains its healthy alignment with ease!