

## **Awareness: The Key to Healthier Living**

**By Kimberly A. Lenzi, Ph.D.**

Time is of the essence; it always appears that we need to get more done in less time. Whether this type of behavior is healthy or not, it is a part of our culture. What we need to remember is our health and fitness is our personal responsibility. It takes active thought and self-care to feel good as we move through our day and our life. Every activity and movement in our daily life can become another chance to strengthen and tone our bodies'. Therefore, by using the environment around us, we can improve our fitness and physique. In order to start this living workout, we need to become observant of our posture and begin training from the inside out. By relying on the tiny muscles deep within our core to initiate all movement, we will become stronger, toner, and more balanced. Pain will begin to diminish as controlled bodily movements replace sloppy, inattentive postures. So, here are some guidelines to help you begin your journey to healthier living.

### *The necessities:*

1. **Always engage your core.** This begins with the internal feeling of pulling in and up. In other words, pull your belly in and lift your pelvic floor up. At first this might feel a little odd and a lot like work; but as you engage these muscles more often, you will begin to notice subtle changes and begin to feel stronger.
2. **Lift your chest.** If you are always slouching, you are crushing your internal organs, not breathing correctly, and allowing the bones of the spine to support your body weight. By lifting your chest you allow the muscles in your back to take the weight of the torso creating strength and length in the spine.
3. **Distribute your weight evenly.** Sinking your weight into one of your hips, standing on one leg, or slouching into the couch or car seat will throw out the natural alignment of your spine. Be aware of how you stand and sit, this will allow you to work your body safely and to its maximum potential.

### *Helpful Tips for Everyday Activities*

#### **Standing at the sink:**

- Lengthen the distance between your lower rib and your hip bone, so that your rib is higher than the sink
- Pull your belly button in and up and squeeze your inner thighs together, and tighten your derrière.
- Do not allow your shoulders to roll forward or rest upon the sink as you do your dishes, but reach from the waist to rinse or place the dishes in the drainer.

#### **Sitting at your computer desk:**

- Keep your chest lifted and sit on your sitz bones. Bring your upper torso slightly in front of your hip. This will center your weight.
- Keep both feet firmly planted on the floor, with your ankles directly under your knees. This will help support some of your body's weight.
- Remember pull in and up and engage your derrière.

**Carrying objects:**

- Equalize the weight of the object being carried by shifting your upper body to the opposite side of the object.
- Lengthen the distance in your waist, creating space between the lower rib and hip bone, to aid the weight placed on your arms and shoulders.
- Keep your shoulders and hips square, pressing the shoulders down and back.

**Carrying Children:**

- Try to keep the child towards the front of the body. Avoid placing the child on an extended hip.
- Keep your shoulders square, as to help avoid contorting the spine.
- Switch sides the child is carried on to avoid asymmetrical muscle development.

**Lifting:**

- Bend from your knees and initiate the lifting motion from the core. Keep pulling the belly in and up.
- Balance your weight and avoid rounding from your spine as you lift your object.

*Postural Checklist*

- Do you roll in or out on your feet?
- Do you stand on one leg?
- Is your weight shifted into one hip when you stand?
- Do you carry your children or groceries on one hip?
- Are you knock-kneed or bowlegged?
- Are your shoulders rounded forward?
- Is one shoulder higher than the other?
- Is your back rounded (either upper middle or lower)?
- Do you have an excessive arch in your back (upper or lower)?
- Does your tummy protrude?

Fitness should become automatic, second nature, and an unconscious competence as you move through the world.

Kim is the president of Mind Body & Pilates, a classic Pilates and Yoga studio in the northwest part of Reno. Kim completed her doctorate in Psychology from the University of Nevada, Reno with emphasis in such areas as health psychology, aging, memory and cognitive science. Over the past 20 years, she has studied and practiced several disciplines of yoga and has been classically trained in the Pilates Method. Kimberly is dedicated to helping people age gracefully and remain physically independent throughout their life. For more information contact Kim at [mindbodypilates@att.net](mailto:mindbodypilates@att.net) or view the studio's website at [www.yogareno.com](http://www.yogareno.com).

\*The direct links listed in this document are to websites not maintained by the Staff Employees' Council. The Staff Employees' Council takes no responsibility for the information listed.