

ASK THE PHYSICAL THERAPIST

NEWSLETTER EDITION 8

BODY MECHANICS

Proper body mechanics are such an integral way of literally saving yourself from injury. It not only teaches safe movement but correct movement for your muscles. I am always asked how to do specific chores like gardening, brushing teeth, making the bed. You'll find that moving in the correct way is actually easier to do because the muscles are being used most efficiently. The problem is that we have taught ourselves how to not move efficiently as we moved away from childhood. Think about it: have you ever seen a baby slouch? Watch as they learn to sit unsupported. They are quite erect. Why? This is how the muscles move more functionally. Muscles protect, stabilize, and move in elongated positions. They become inhibited with the compression. So try slouching and then lift your leg. Now sit upright and lift the leg. It should have felt not only easier, but the quality of movement should have been smoother and lighter. Now observe a toddler as she/he goes to pick up a ball from the ground. They get right up close to the ball and squat down to retrieve it, not bend over from the waist. So what happened to us as we got older to change these great mechanics to poor ones? Well that would be a good research project for the future.

In this edition of the newsletter I will talk about reaching for objects. As we head further into the heavy gardening season this becomes more relevant. We reach for the mulch in the trunk of the car, for the weeds behind the bushes, or the trowel on the ground. In subsequent editions, I will discuss mechanics for other activities. The biggest thing to remember is that you want the object to be part of you, so it needs to be close to you. As soon as you become a part of the object you are extending yourself with a weight that is crossing 2 joints, creating a longer lever arm that will cause stress in a part of the body that can't handle it, more than likely your back. So you are setting yourself up for injury because one day the body will say that's enough and that less than an ounce pencil you just picked up will "throw your back out".

Instead what you should do is get as close as possible to the object you want to lift. It doesn't matter if it's on the shelf in the garage, the ground, or in the trunk of your car. Once you are as close as possible, there are various positions you can be in depending on the height of where the object is. If it is in your trunk, or

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giving them the confidence to
achieve their goals of an
active, mobile lifestyle
without the use of pain
medications or surgery.**

beyond reach of your extended arm, lift one leg up then reach. With the trunk of your car, lean against the bumper with your thighs and then lift a leg up behind you. This puts your body to your leg in one line when you reach forward into the trunk so you don't stress the back. Once you have grasped the object with both your hands, lower your leg as you lean away to pull it forward towards you. Now you are using your body weight instead of incorrect muscles or straining in those muscles. The object is now at the bumper end of the trunk, bend your knees keeping your buttocks down towards the ground, wrap your arms around the object keeping it close to you (think of hugging it), then straighten your knees holding the object against you.

Here's the tricky part. Everyone has heard bend from your knees or use your legs, but most people don't do this correctly. When you squat down, even if it's only 1" you have to squat, the buttocks must face directly to the ground and the spine stays straight from head to buttock. If you stick your buttocks out behind you, even when bending your knees, you are now using your back. Then just straighten your legs with the buttocks facing the ground, not out behind you. If you still feel strain when trying to lift a heavy object, **DO NOT** lift it. Wait for help.

Again, if you lift one leg up and keep the spine straight from head to buttock, this relieves the stress on the back. You can try it now - stand up and lean over the table. Now lift one leg and then lean over the table. Feel the difference? You should feel relief in the back because there is no strain there with one leg off the floor.

If you are in the garden weeding, get on your hands and knees, keep your spine straight or like a tabletop and, staying close to the weed, reach for the weed. Now if it has been raining, the ground is soft and it doesn't take any effort to pull it out. But if the ground is hard, grasp the weed and lean your body away from it to pull it out.

One last note, if you still feel strain when trying to lift a heavy object, **DO NOT lift it**. Wait for help. So think about how you move in your daily activities and how your body feels when you do these activities. If there is strain, something is off.

Need more help with the issues you are having? Give us a call or send us an email and we can set up a time to discuss what you are going through in a **FREE 20 minute Discovery call**. You can email us at : **cynthiaweiss@verizon.net** or call us at: **301-493-9257**.

Stay safe and strong. To be continued with other movements we do daily.

I would love to hear from you so we can discuss your goals, your particular issues you are having, and if we are a good fit for each other, how we can work together to achieve your goals. Just hit "reply" to this email.

Did you know that Maryland has Direct Access for physical therapy? That means you can see a Physical Therapist without seeing your physician first and getting a prescription. We can evaluate and treat you without a referral. Through the extensive evaluation, if I feel that other issues may be involved that may require you to see your physician, I will refer you back or recommend someone who is appropriate for you.

STILL NEED HELP? CALL TO DISCUSS YOUR ISSUES OR BOOK AN APPOINTMENT IF YOU ARE READY: 301-493-9257

If you are still unsure of Physical Therapy, we offer a 100% **free 20 minute Discovery Call** to answer all your questions and see if you are the right fit for our clinic. **Call us at: 301-493-9257 or email us at cynthiaweiss@verizon.net**. We will get back to you the same day as soon as we are finished with our other patients.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Pilates/Exercise class: 5 class series for \$105 June 20th – July 25th (no class on July 4th) Wednesdays 12-1 at

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Please feel free to share this newsletter with anyone who you feel would benefit from reading it.

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