

Ergonomic Benefits of Suspenders: Posture's Unsung Hero

Posture is the body's natural balancing act. Without good posture, various health problems can occur. Self-image also can suffer, since good posture makes a person stand taller and look more confident. Some people do not realize that suspenders, which were the primary method of holding up pants until the early 1900s, have the added benefit of improving posture.

We use our muscles reflexively to balance ourselves when we sit, stand, sleep or work. Our bodies would fall forward without muscles pulling us back. When your body is balanced, it is self-supporting and requires very little help from your back muscles. Taking strain off of your back can help to avoid many injuries. This can become especially important in certain types of jobs or activities. With correct posture, your internal organs have room to function normally, and blood circulates freely to create the best total fitness.

Wearing suspenders contributes to better posture by applying pressure on the shoulders, stimulating the brain and the body to straighten and balance itself front to back, in much the same way that balancing a book on your head stimulates the body to straighten and balance itself in all directions.

The body naturally wants to balance itself. The brain and the body take in many sensual cues for sustaining balance and posture, including visual, inner ear (cochlea) and pressure exerted on the muscles and joints. We feel balanced based upon the information sent from the muscles and joints to our brains, and our brains assume that we are balanced when there is equal pressure from side to side and back to front.

Suspender straps provide an additional physical sense to give the body even more cues. The gentle pressure exerted by suspender straps on the shoulders "tricks" the body by creating the necessary stimulus that forces it to respond by straightening and balancing from front to back. This, in turn, has the effect of making the person "stand taller."



Good standing posture is when the ears, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles are "stacked" in a straight line, shoulders relaxed and knees slightly bent. Poor posture causes muscular strain that can cause injuries and wastes energy. Good posture, enhanced by wearing suspenders, makes the person look healthier, allows clothes to fit better and makes a better impression on others.

The result of wearing suspenders then, is healthier for the entire body. They cause the body to reflexively straighten itself, encouraging the person to stand taller. Suspender wearing also creates better posture and eliminates pressure on abdominal organs while sitting or standing, since pants can be worn more loosely. Habitual suspender wearers can now claim health rewards as well as fashion rewards.

To Prove That Suspenders Encourage Your body to Stand Straighter, Try This Simple Test:

1. Draw a line approximately 6 inches away from a wall.
2. Facing your body away from the wall, place your heels on the line that you have drawn.
3. Stand how you would normally, and use a measuring tape or ruler to measure the distance between the wall and the top of your shoulders.
4. Then, put on a pair of suspenders, adjusted taut enough so that there is a gentle pressure on the shoulders.
5. Face away from the wall with your heels on the line, and re-measure the distance between the wall and the top of your shoulders.
6. Depending upon the original standing posture, there will be from 1/2 inch to 2 inches less distance from the shoulder to the wall in the second measurement. The back will be noticeably straighter in the suspender wearer than the non-wearer.

Sal Herman was born in Europe in 1946. In 1975, he started Industrial Paramedical Services Inc., which serves clients throughout the Midwest. It is now the largest Midwestern provider of mobile health screening to industry. As a long-time suspender wearer, and frustrated because the clips continually slipped off his pants, he sought a way to create the proverbial better "mouse-trap". In 1990, he received a patent for a revolutionary "no-slip" suspender clip. Under the name Hold-Up Suspender Co., he began producing and marketing suspenders that utilized these clips in 1996. His stated goal is to show the world both the fashionable and health benefits of suspender wearing.

Judith Patt Herman, BS, OTR, was born in Detroit in 1946. She received her degree in occupational therapy from Wayne State University in 1971. Her expertise is in the rehabilitative, psychiatric, home healthcare and geriatric fields of occupational therapy. For more information on the Hold-Up Suspender Co. and the ergonomic benefits of suspenders, visit www.suspenders.com or call (800) 700-4515.