

The Dreaded "Dowager's Hump"

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You might have seen her ever so gingerly slowly moving her way down the street. She was the older senior who was using a walker or cane to help get her by. She might have even had her arm clutching a purse but she was still very recognizable. She had this slow moving frame with a noticeable rounded back. She was hunched over as if her body was being pressed down and carrying a heavy load. She looked fatigued and out of breath. Her shrunken body projected an age far beyond her actual age.

She was the woman your school teachers warned you about when they screamed at you to sit up straight. Your mother was incessantly nagging you to stop hunching over so

that you would not end up like this poor old woman. She is the bedraggled lady with the "Dowager's Hump."

A Dowager's Hump is a rounded area of the back around C-7. This condition is usually seen in older people, especially in women. The name came from the association of older women who were hunched over, nearly with their faces looking toward the ground. It does not have to be just a woman or an elderly person to develop a Dowager's Hump. Younger people and men too can create this condition as well.

Once the spine starts to round it becomes like a run-away train for many. Most people do not understand where it all began and find it difficult to correct. It often gets labeled by the medical profession as "hyper-kyphosis" or severe rounding of the upper back. Braces and even surgery are some of the medical techniques used to try to correct it.

As the posture rounds there is often a build up of minerals and fats in this area as lack of circulation is one of the symptoms. It might appear as if one had a camel's hump as fatty tissue and swollen membranes create a gelatin-like affect. The area is usually dense and thick with congestion. There is poor circulation as well as low energy (chi) flows through it. Once you develop a Dowager's Hump you have a blockage of flow in your upper back. It might even be uncomfortable or even painful at times. It feels as if you have a constant pressure or nagging in your upper back. It is as if you have an itch that never seems to go away.

While the medical profession might label the cause of the Dowager's Hump as being derived from genetics, family history, old age and DNA abnormalities, none of that is true. The real cause for most people in developing a Dowager's Hump is self-induced.

The shrinking of the front of the body is the prime cause of the rounding of the back. The front of the body and the back of the body work in tandem. As the muscles and fascia in the front of the body harden and tighten it pulls the torso forward and downward. The trunk of the body shortens and collapses. As this collapse occurs the back of the body is forced to round in order to compensate.

There are several reason why the front of the body collapses. When you hunch over frequently, like at the computer or other work stations, you are training your muscles to shorten and the fascia to harden. This daily ritual will help to create a shortened front and a rounded back. Over time you will continue to lose inches in your spine and will have appeared to have shrunk over time. The roundedness will make you appear as if you have shrunk. In order to see you will have to create a significant arch in your neck as your face wants to point downward.

Long-standing weight training is another way that the front of the body will continue to harden and shorten causing the back of the body to round. Lifting weights without stretching out the shoulders and



The Dowager's Hump begins from the shrinking of the front of the trunk

back muscles will develop an uneven body with the front much tighter than the back. Constant abdominal exercises to tighten your core will also contribute to the collapse of the trunk in front and a rounding in back. Weight training over time will only create a shortened front torso and a rounded upper back.

Another way that the Dowager's Hump develops is because of emotional patterns stuck in the chest. Emotions like shame and grief are often carried across the front of the chest. For instance, if you feel insecure in life or are not comfortable with your body you might unconsciously roll your shoulders forward and tighten the front of your trunk. This is a symbolic gesture of not feeling safe in the world and wishing to hide. As this pattern continues over time the upper back begins to round and the Dowager's Hump is formed. Body language speaks to us on a far deeper level than does verbal communication. A person with a Dowager's Hump is frequently someone who does not feel safe and supported in his own body.

As this pattern continues over time there are many complications that could arise. Someone with this condition might suffer from upper back and neck stiffness that never seems to leave. Sleeping might be difficult as it might not be easy to have your head supported on a pillow. Pinched nerves in the neck or "thoracic outlet syndrome" where a squeezed nerve traveling from the neck to the arm might create a numb or tingling hand.

Scoliosis is one of the spinal patterns that often shows itself in an advanced stage. The spine has to keep changing as the back becomes more and more rounded. Bones do not move by themselves. As the tight muscles and fascia in front continue to harden and shorten the back muscles will continue to harden and the spinal vertebrae will continue to be pulled out of alignment.

This pattern is correctable, especially if you catch it early on. The longer you wait to correct it the more likely that it will not be correctable. Most people wait too long and ignore it. By the time they wake up to the fact that they have a problem it might be too late.

One method to correct the Dowager's Hump is through a specific set of yoga therapy exercises. Not just any yoga class or yoga posture will make this happen. The focus needs to be on lengthening the front of the body and releasing



*Yoga Therapy: Monday June 26th,
2019 as seen on "The Doctors"
television show*

the old patterns that have become firmly rooted in place. There are specific classes and treatments that provide this resource.

Also, connective tissue bodywork is another wonderful method to help heal the Dowager's Hump. A practitioner will use his hands to carve away tension areas and lengthen the shortened fascia in the front of the chest and in the upper back and neck region. For most people this could be a very effective strategy for healing if one is willing to commit to several sessions.

Postural reminders are also a good way to self-correct this situation. Place a small note on or near your computer to remind you to sit up straight. Place a reminder in your car so that when you are driving you can maintain that straight posture.

Don't be lost in a wayward diagnosis that gives you no hope. Get off the medical blame game train where you are taught that your body ultimately fails you and there is nothing you can do about it. Take your power back and know that you can heal yourself.

A Dowager's Hump is not a life sentence to pain, a shrunken body and ridicule. But it is a wake-up call for many that whatever you have been doing for many years is not only ineffective but it can be debilitating. If you want to live your life looking like the *Hunchback of Notre Dame* then that is up to you. It does not have to be the end of your story. When you walk down the street do you want to be admired for your relaxed gait and upright posture or do you want to be secretly judged and ridiculed?

Resources:

- 1. Yoga Therapy**
YogAlign.com
- 2. Connective Tissue Bodywork**
JonBurras.com