

Study results suggest improving posture may help reduce depression

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(Medical Xpress)—A team of researchers at the University of Auckland has found evidence that suggests people who are depressed can improve their outlook simply by modifying their posture while sitting. In their

paper published in *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, the team outlines experiments they conducted with volunteers and what they learned from them.

Most people know that [posture](#) is related to mood. When feeling tired or down, we tend to slump or slouch, especially when sitting. Prior research has suggested that simply improving one's posture can lead to an improvement in mood. But what about people who are depressed? Could something as simple as sitting up straight help improve symptoms? That is what the researchers with this new effort wanted to know.

To learn more the researchers enlisted 61 volunteers, all of whom showed signs of depression in a questionnaire responses. The researchers asked all of the volunteers to sit and to give a five-minute speech that would be judged— afterward, each was asked to try to count backwards from 1,022 by 13, two activities known to evoke stress and thus depressive symptoms. Each volunteer was also asked to fill out several questionnaires given during various stages of the experiment. Prior to the start of the experiments, the volunteers were unknowingly assigned to one of two groups, Improved Posture (IP) and Usual Posture (UP.) Those in the IP group were asked to sit up straight during the tasks and some even had sturdy tape applied to their back and shoulders to help them maintain an upright posture. Those in the UP group were allowed to sit any way they pleased.

After analyzing data from the experiments, the researchers found that those in the IP group reported feeling less tired and more enthusiasm, which, the researchers suggested, indicated more energy and less negativity. The IP group also answered questions using more words than those in the UP group and used words such as "I" and "me" less often, which the researchers suggest indicated they were feeling less focused on themselves.

The researchers did not conduct a follow-up with the [volunteers](#); thus, it is unclear how long the [mood changes](#) persisted. The researchers caution that they are not suggesting posture improvement as a strategy for treatment of people with depression—their intent was simply to learn more.

More information: Carissa Wilkes et al, Upright posture improves affect and fatigue in people with depressive symptoms, *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jbtep.2016.07.015](#)

Abstract

Background and objectives

Slumped posture is a diagnostic feature of depression. While research shows upright posture improves self-esteem and mood in healthy samples, little research has investigated this in depressed samples. This study aimed to investigate whether changing posture could reduce negative affect and fatigue in people with mild to moderate depression undergoing a stressful task.

Methods

Sixty-one community participants who screened positive for mild to moderate depression were recruited into a study purportedly on the effects of physiotherapy tape on cognitive function. They were randomized to sit with usual posture or upright posture and physiotherapy tape was applied. Participants completed the Trier Social Stress Test speech task. Changes in affect and fatigue were assessed. The words spoken by the participants during their speeches were analysed.

Results

At baseline, all participants had significantly more slumped posture than normative data. The postural manipulation significantly improved

posture and increased high arousal positive affect and fatigue compared to usual posture. The upright group spoke significantly more words than the usual posture group, used fewer first person singular personal pronouns, but more sadness words. Upright shoulder angle was associated with lower negative affect and lower anxiety across both groups.

Limitations

The experiment was only brief and a non-clinical sample was used.

Conclusions

This preliminary study suggests that adopting an upright posture may increase positive affect, reduce fatigue, and decrease self-focus in people with mild-to-moderate depression. Future research should investigate postural manipulations over a longer time period and in samples with clinically diagnosed depression.

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