

Tennis Ball Wheels: it Doesn't have to be this way

"Promoting Active Lifestyles"

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Balance Matters 2008

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As our elders' lives inch forward, into an entertaining (sometimes irksome) but often whimsical array of hearing aids, pill boxes, incontinence helpers, lapses in memory and walkers with tennis-ball wheels, how can we, the children play our part as care-giver and re-invigorator?



How can we enliven the senior scene again?

It was characterized to me by a student that it seemed just a matter of days when one of her parents went from "walking fine to using a "walker" to finally choosing a "self-help, powered-mobility device.

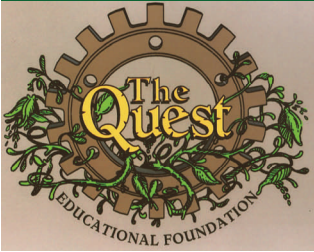
It seemed like a rapid progression, a perplexing slippery slope that actually is quite easy to understand in the context of a combination of factors such as aging, lifestyle, medications and options.

"The option to use a Powered Mobility Device (PMD) as a lifestyle choice is a **NO EXIT strategy**," I explained to an audience of Occupational and Physical Therapists at the 2008 International Conference on Aging, Disability and Independence in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Gravitas: Leading with Your Head

It's a cocktail of declining muscle strength (especially in the core and legs), less natural movement activity, limiting lung capacity, lower equilibrium thresholds and lack of energizing social context.

To counter my student's observation, I asked when was the last time her mom got out of a chair without using her arms (on the arms rests of the chair) to push herself up. When did she get up by simply following her head? Like a four year old moves from the floor or out of a chair? She replied, "that a stiff lower back seemingly made it impossible." I didn't buy that and, in fact, demonstrated how "leading with your head" made the move to get up out of a chair relatively effortless (with respect to lower back motion) by shifting the center of gravity toward your pelvis. (Which had the wonderful by-product of strengthening core muscles.)



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Powered Mobility Device can be a no-exit strategy...

Oh to Be Four Again (is not just wishful thinking)

It's a paradox that "leading with your head" shifts the weight to your lower body. Though a quick glance at body design resolves the enigma in an instant. Our bodies weren't built for chairs or Reccaro race cars seats or even the most comfortable recliner sofa-chairs. Our bodies were made to move. When not in motion, our most healthful position is to be closer to the ground than modern life-ways and practices dictate. Watch a four year old's lifestyle for a day and see how often they want to inhabit a chair. No surprise -- they typically take to a chair only when directed or interacting with some contemporary lifestyle device like a gaming console, etc.

End Part 1.



Coming in Part II: **Back to the Future: Modern "Caveman Posture"**



Studies show that 80% of people in the United States will suffer some form of debilitating back pain in their lifetimes. This is in sharp contrast to some other cultures around the world, where back pain is present in less than 5% of the population.

Take a Deep Breath: Optimum, Natural Balance Helps Walking and Breathing

As mentioned, modern mobility lifestyles are one main culprit that slowly restrict movement of the diaphragm as a result of underactive upper body rotation (less arm sway) and weakening of the deep, core lower back muscles which: 1) tilts the pelvis, 2) decreases movement in lower ribs and, 3) elevates the scapula.

Another reason: **posture habits** that chronically have our body doing extra work to support bones and muscles that are out of alignment.

A potent solution to back pain is an adjustment in posture to a more natural, optimum balanced way of standing/positioning...

Randy Eady, M.Ed, a former professor and counselor in Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the USAF Academy, CO, is a big proponent of the wellness benefits of leisure recreation and integrative exercise. He's an intergenerational balance and coordination specialist who conducts Balance Bookends movement classes for the young (between the age of 4-9) and those "young at heart" hovering around 60. He's designed a curriculum pack (The Glider Rider Flight Plan) and booklet (Tommy and Grandpa Learn to Ride) to supplement his Glider Rider Series of Youth and Mature Adult Balance and Coordination Learning and Refinement Bikes.

He has consulted with the Consortium of Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Centers of the Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (GRECC-VA), the National Council on Aging and the American Society on Aging. His work assists health care professionals implement socially facilitated, multi-generational wellness programs directed at leg muscle strength as the #1 factor in physical health for older populations. You can find out more about his classes at Generations United (www.gu.org).