

## Telling it straight

*Posture at work  
can be  
a pain in the neck*

By **WENDY McLELLAN**

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**Y**ou probably first heard the words when you were a little kid: "Stand up straight." "Put your shoulders back." "Lift your chin."

It was good advice but, if you're like most kids, the words didn't mean much. Now that you're a grownup and you spend your working life sitting at a desk, or standing on your feet, or carrying things around, you might want to consider those childhood instructions. It might even cure some of those aches and pains.

"We've been hearing 'Stand up straight' forever — that's all people know," says Rob Williams, a Vancouver kinesiologist with a passion for good posture.

"People know what posture is, but they don't have any idea how important it is, and they're not getting enough education about it."

Williams is determined to remedy the situation.

This week, he opens his Performance Posture clinic next to his two-year-old personal training facility in downtown Vancouver.

His idea is to integrate several health-care professions — chiropractic, physiotherapy, podiatry and massage therapy — into one clinic and focus on improving people's posture at work and play and in the rest of their daily living. If they also want to develop their body strength, the fitness-studio trainers can help.

Good posture improves every system in the body, Williams says. It also increases productivity at work and reduces fatigue and injury-related absenteeism.

For instance, teaching people to hold their heads in a neutral position reduces muscle tension in the neck and upper body, relieves headaches and improves breathing. Holding your shoulders in proper alignment improves range of motion in the arms and prevents rotator-cuff problems.

"If you can reduce muscle fatigue, you improve performance," Williams says. "It's not enough to get people sitting well at their desks without teaching them to stand as well."

"It's not as simple as standing up straight. Good posture is being in a neutral, balanced alignment and it's a little different for everybody."

Anna-Kristina Arnold, an ergonomics lecturer with Simon



**Rob Williams helps Lynda Cannell, president and CEO of the Sports Medicine Council of B.C., with her posture at his Mixx Co-Fitness Studio in Vancouver.**

— Photo by Canwest News Service

Fraser University's kinesiology department, says the posture clinic's multidisciplinary approach is an interesting new concept.

"It's definitely good to focus on posture," she says. "We need to train people about posture, teach them to pay attention, but we also have to have work environments that support good posture."

"We've accommodated to designs that don't take humans into consideration. Now we're trying to design technology to fit human bodies, rather than the other way around."

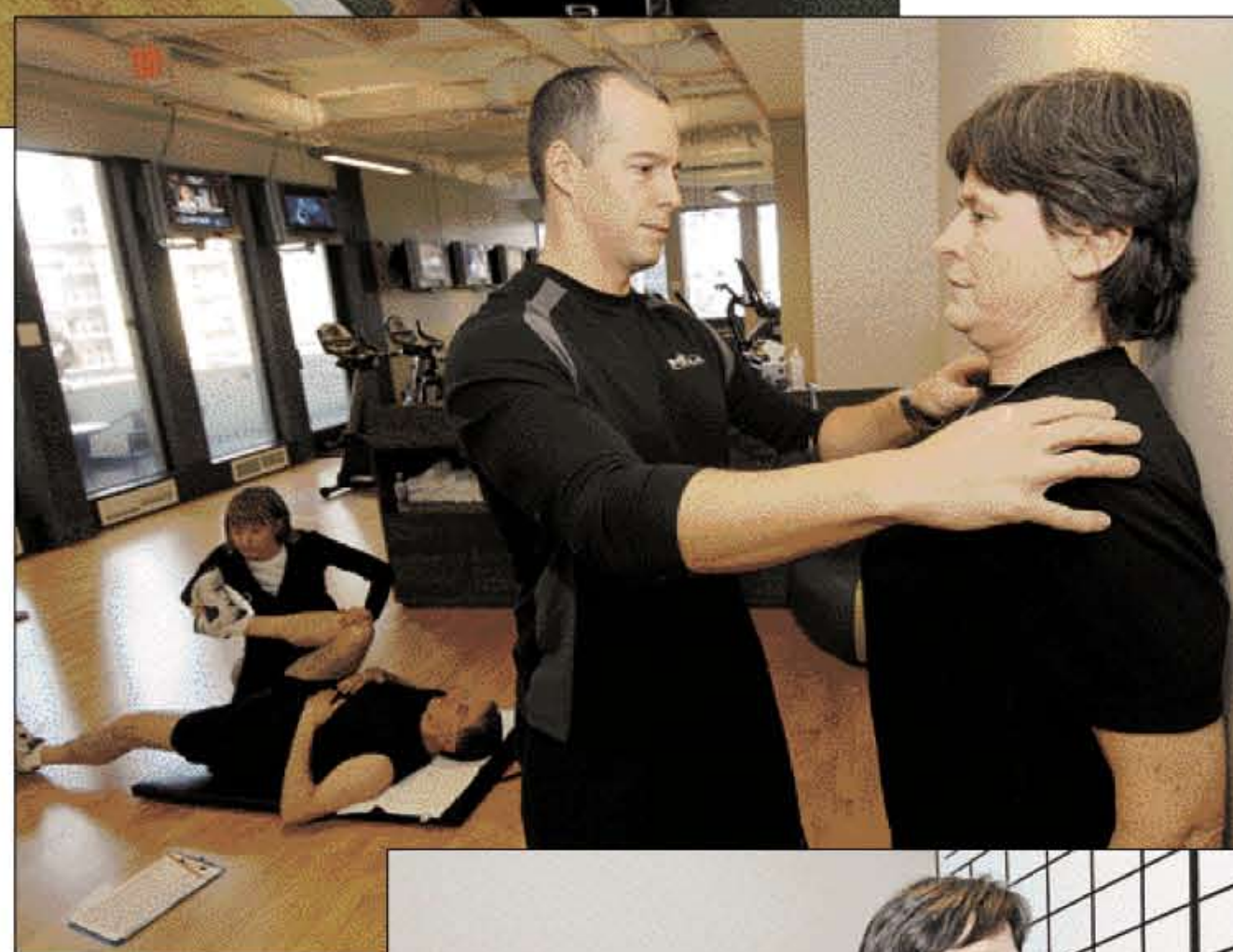
Kerry Maxwell, a Vancouver physiotherapist, says many of the patients who come to her clinic have problems that can be traced to poor posture.

"Posture is always something we look at and address, but it's ridiculously hard to get people to change their posture," she says. "You have to be pretty diligent to change habits."

"You have to teach people what it means to have good posture. It's about maintaining the three natural curves in the spine to minimize the work it has to do."

Restaurant owners Bud and Doty Kanke have already decided to send all their managers for posture checks and then offer the service to all employees.

"In the restaurant business, people are on their feet a long time and, if you don't have aches and pains, you've got more energy," Doty Kanke says. "I think good posture is important to prevent injuries, but it's also



about presence.

"It's great if you've got nice clothes, but if you don't stand up straight, you don't have the same presence. I think it gives people self-confidence."

Offering staff access to the posture clinic is good for business and it's also another perk that may attract people to an industry desperately short of workers, as well as keep existing employees healthy.

"We're interested in anything to do with health and wellbeing," she says. "Bud's an accountant — he doesn't do anything that's not going to improve the bottom line."

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