BODY LOGIC

STRENGTH • FLEXIBILITY • BALANCE

The simple posture fix nobody ever had time to show you

Vincent R. Marino
Posture correction specialist · 45 years

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A Note on How This Book Was Written

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Page One

You've been told to sit up straight your whole life.

Maybe you've already tried the doctor, the specialist, and everything in between. Maybe it helped for a while. And something still hurts — or you're afraid it will again.

Here's what probably happened: nobody ever had the time to show you how your whole body fits together. That's not your fault, and it's not theirs.

This book takes that time. It gives you one simple idea, and it shows you how that idea works in *your* body — with your shoes, your job, your old injuries, and your habits.

In a few pages, you'll stand up and try it on yourself. It takes about ten minutes.

Keep reading. I'll show you.

Chapter 1 — How This Started

The Injury

When I was about fifteen, I was sparring and fooling around with someone much bigger than me, outside the martial arts school. That’s exactly where careless things happen. He fell on top of me and bent my lower back backward so hard that I broke several small bones in my lower spine.

I never went to a hospital or saw a medical doctor for it. My family didn’t have the money, and I hid how bad the pain was. I was a young man deep into fitness and martial arts, and back then,

showing weakness felt dangerous. So I buried it.

No X-rays, no surgery. Back then, at fifteen, what I got was a chiropractor — twice a day. My dad owned a restaurant, and he worked out a trade with the chiropractor: meals for adjustments. Those visits helped me tremendously. They got me through the worst of it, and they taught me a lot about what was going on with my bones and my spine. Years later, a different chiropractor took the first X-rays of my back and asked right away, “When did you break your back?” The bones had healed on their own. A young body finds its own way.

But I needed more than someone to put things back in place. I needed to learn how to keep them there — every hour of every day, long after I walked out of that office. That's the part I had to figure out on my own.

The Cost

That healing came at a price. Scar tissue formed around the breaks. I lost the ability to arch backward. A full bridge — hands and feet on the floor, back arched — has been gone ever since. So were the high kicks and spinning kicks I wanted so badly as a kid.

And the injury still has teeth. Every now and then, something as small as leaning the wrong way to

grab a sock sets it off. It's like a switch flips. The pain drops me straight to the floor and takes my breath away.

Here's the strange part. If I don't move at all, there is no pain. Lying flat, gravity asks nothing of my spine. But if I try to lift my arm six inches to reach my phone, my core tightens on its own before my arm ever moves. That small, automatic squeeze is enough to set it off. It feels like electricity running through my lower back.

When it happens, it doesn't let go for at least three days. I sleep on the floor. I eat on the floor. Everything happens on the floor. The phone I left within reach for exactly this kind of emergency might as well be on the moon.

And if a friend walked in and asked how I was doing, as long as I stayed still and looked up at them, I'd say I felt great. Because I did. Until I blinked wrong.

What the Pain Taught Me

I was a teenager with a high pain tolerance. I healed, but the pain never fully went away. Instead, it became information. Some positions caused it. Others relieved it.

Water skiing hurt right away — arms stretched out in front holding the rope, back rounded and twisting. Sitting the wrong way hurt. Standing too long in one position hurt.

When my lower back hurt, I slouched to get away from it. Slouching just moved the pain up into my neck and upper back. The whole body fell out of line trying to escape one sore spot.

The old advice didn't work either. "Sit up straight. Shoulders back. Chest out." Try it. Your ribs flare, your lower back arches, and you can't hold it for more than a minute. That is not a position a person can live in.

So I started experimenting, one small change at a time. I tipped my pelvis forward and back and felt it change all the way up my spine. I pulled my shoulder blades back and found positions that felt better — not just less painful, but more solid.

Then I put it all together. Shoulder blades back. Core tight. Then I tipped forward from the hip socket, just a couple of degrees.

The pain acted like a dial. Too far forward, it came back. Not far enough, it came back. There was one exact spot — just right — where I could squeeze my whole core as hard as I could and feel zero pain.

I called it my Power Stance. It still works today.

Hurt Plenty. Never in Training.

Don’t picture me as someone fragile, handling my body like

glass. I'm an adrenaline junkie, and I always have been.

Besides breaking my back, I've broken bones in my feet and hands in martial arts. I fell while mountain climbing and badly dislocated a shoulder. I skydive — and still love it; a friend and I are always encouraging people to come jump with us. I've also flown a hang glider in winds I had no business flying in, and got blown into the side of a mountain — my friends said I bounced eight feet off the ground. That one dislocated a shoulder too. I've cracked a wrist. And I've done more silly adrenaline things than I care to list.

Every one of those injuries taught me something, because each time,

I had to figure out how to fix myself and live with the pain afterward.

Here's what might surprise you. In forty-five years of training myself and my clients this way, getting hurt during a training session has been almost unheard of.

That isn't luck. To me, the word *training* means doing it without harm. If you get hurt, you weren't training. You were taking a risk. I save my risks for the mountain and the sky. In training, everything is slow, specific, and deliberate. When you train that way, it's extremely hard to get hurt.

That’s how this book will teach you, too.

Why This Matters to You

I’m not telling you this so you’ll feel sorry for me. I’m telling you because this is where everything in this book comes from. I didn’t learn it from a textbook first. I learned it on a floor, from my own body. Sometimes decades later, I found the science that explained what I had already been teaching with my hands.

When your back goes out reaching for a sock, it’s a much lighter version of what I just described. My spine healed with less room than a normal one, so it takes very little to set it off. Yours

has more room for error. But both come from the same root: how you hold your body decides how much pain it hands you.

That’s why I still practice everything in this book, every single day. If I stop, I’m one wrong reach away from three more days on that floor.

What I found in my own body exists in every body — not just injured ones. You don’t need my history to find yours. You just need to know it’s there and how to look for it. When you find it, your body will tell you right away.

Chapter 2 — What This Book Gives You

What I Hear From My Clients

Most people don’t come to me first. They come to me after.

After the family doctor. After the specialist. After the X-ray, the MRI, and the trip back to the doctor. After physical therapy, and then another specialist across town. They tell their story over and over to someone new. Each person looks at their own piece of the problem, and each one is good at that piece. But by the time these clients reach me, they are more confused than when they started.

That is not anybody’s fault. It’s how the system is built. We live in a world with a specialist for everything, and every visit costs time and money. Medicine divides the body into parts because that is how it gets studied, taught, and paid for. Each specialist is trained to look closely at their own part, and they do real, valuable work there.

But they see a lot of patients. They have fifteen minutes with you, not an hour. There simply isn’t time to sit down and teach you how your whole body fits together — how your shoulders affect your back, how your back affects your hips, how all of it affects your balance.

That’s where I come in. I take the time. For 45 years, I’ve gathered what all of these specialists know, added what I’ve learned from my own body and thousands of hours with clients, and boiled it down to the simplest thing that actually works.

That simple thing is the Power Stance. It’s one idea that ties all the pieces back together. That’s what I give my clients. It’s what this book gives you.

One Doctor’s Story

One of the leading men’s health doctors here in the Coachella Valley, Dr. Alex Del Rosario, is a serious bodybuilder himself — five foot nine and about 250 pounds of

muscle. For years he trained all-out, the way competitive bodybuilders train. His joints started to hurt. Eventually, he couldn't bench press anymore.

When he started training with me, we slowed everything down and built every exercise on the Power Stance. His joint pain went away. Today he tells people he has better muscle development than he has ever had.

He also told me something I've never forgotten: "Vincent, we don't learn the body the way you learn it. We're taught to fix things once they're broken." As he remembers it, all his years of medical training included only about forty-five minutes on prevention.

That isn’t a knock on doctors. It’s how their training is built, and they are excellent at what they’re trained to do. They fix what’s broken. I help people keep it from breaking again. We need each other.

Three Things You Want, One Thing Underneath

You probably want three things from your body. You want to be stronger. You want to be more flexible. You want better balance.

Most people chase these separately. Weights for strength. A stretch class for flexibility. A wobble board for balance. Three rooms, three instructors, three different fixes.

Here is the simple idea: all three come from the same place.

When your body is organized — balanced against gravity, sitting in its natural, neutral, resting position — strength, flexibility, and balance all get easier to reach. At the same time. Not one after another.

There's a word for that organized body: **tensegrity**. It's two words put together — *tension* and *integrity*. Your bones push. Your muscles and connective tissue pull. When the pushing and pulling are balanced, your whole body holds itself up without strain. Chapter 5 explains it in more detail. For now, just remember this: balance against

gravity is the base. Strength and flexibility are built on top of it.

Your Nervous System Is the Gatekeeper

Here’s why that works.

When your body is out of position, your nervous system knows it, even if you don’t. Picture sitting slumped at a desk all afternoon. You might feel comfortable. But your nervous system is working the whole time to hold you together in that position. It braces. It tightens. It guards.

A guarded body won’t let you get stronger. It won’t let a tight muscle lengthen. And it has less left over to catch you if you slip on ice.

When your body is organized, your nervous system can stand down. It stops guarding. Strength, flexibility, and balance stop fighting you. That is the whole idea of this book in a few sentences.

Everybody Sits Up Straight — the Wrong Way

When I meet someone new and they ask what I do, I tell them I’m a posture correction specialist. And every single person does the same thing. They instantly sit up straight and tell me they have terrible posture.

It’s a reflex. And I tell them, “It’s funny — everybody does that, and everybody does it wrong.”

Watch what happens. The chest puffs up and the ribs lift. The lower back arches. The shoulders get yanked back so hard that the elbows end up behind the body. And usually the shoulders creep up toward the ears at the same time. That’s the posture most of us were taught. It looks like effort. It isn’t correct, and nobody can hold it for more than a minute.

You’ve probably heard the cues a thousand times, too: “Shoulders back and down, into your back pockets.” “Use your core.” Trainers and coaches say them every day. The words aren’t wrong. But almost nobody explains what they actually mean in the body — and so almost

everybody does them the wrong way.

What makes the Power Stance work isn’t the words. It’s the details: which muscles do the job, which direction each part moves, and how to check that you did it right. That’s what the next chapter teaches.

The Tool: Your Power Stance

The Power Stance is how you get your body organized. It has three parts. You’ve heard versions of them before. What you probably haven’t heard is the detail that makes each one work:

1. **Shoulder blades back and down.** You’ve heard this one:

“Shoulders back and down, into your back pockets.” The words are fine. The problem is the path most people take to get there. They yank their elbows back behind their body. They puff up their chest and arch their lower back, which only fakes the look. Or they shrug their shoulders up toward their ears. From across the gym, all of these look like “back and down.” None of them are. Each one uses big strength muscles to fake the position, and the real posture muscles never switch on. (Chapter 4 explains the difference.) The right path is quieter: your arms stay in front of you, and your shoulder blades glide back

and down along your ribs, pulled by the lower part of your trapezius — the muscle below your shoulder blades — working together with the muscles between them. Your ribs stay down, your elbows stay in front of your ribs, and your shoulders stay away from your ears. (The technical names are *scapular retraction* for back and *scapular depression* for down.)

2. **Close your core.** Not sucking your belly button in, and not puffing your chest out. The detail most people miss: you pull your lowest front ribs down until they tuck in behind your stomach muscles. That keeps a small, natural

curve in your lower back instead of a big arch.

3. **Tip forward slightly from your hip socket.** Not tilting your pelvis, and not bending your spine. The detail most people miss: your whole upper body tips forward as one solid piece, just a degree or two, from the joint where your thigh bone meets your pelvis. Your knees soften, and your hip finds its own balance. (This is the *femoral hip socket pivot*.)

All three happen together, at the same time. Leave one out, and it isn't a Power Stance.

And here's the biggest detail of all. Try it right now.

Pull your shoulder blades back and down. Notice what your ribs just did — they lifted, and your belly opened up. Now close your core and pull your ribs down. Notice what your shoulders just did — they started rolling forward.

That happens to everybody, every time. Your nervous system wants the front of your body to move as one piece: all open, or all closed. When you pull one part back, it drags the other open. When you close one part down, it drags the other forward. The Power Stance asks for something your nervous system was never taught — shoulder blades back while your ribs go down and in, at the same

time, two parts moving in opposite directions.

That’s how stubborn your nervous system is. It’s also why “shoulders back” and “use your core,” taught as two separate cues, almost never work. The next chapter shows you how to put them together.

The Power Stance is a tool, not an exercise. You don’t do it for a set of ten and move on. You carry it with you everywhere — lifting a box, climbing stairs, getting out of bed, pushing a grocery cart. The next chapter shows you how to find yours.

When You Use It: The Three States

Every moment of your life, your body is in one of three states:

- **The Active State** is real effort against real load. Lifting a heavy box. A hard set at the gym. Shoveling snow. Here the Power Stance is at full strength.
- **The Transitional State** is ordinary movement. Reaching for a cup. Walking. Stretching. Here the Power Stance is used lightly.
- **The Restorative State** is true rest. Lying down. Sleeping. Here the Power Stance is switched off, and your body gets to fully let go.

Chapter 6 covers all three in full.

The Active State is where the Power Stance works hardest. That doesn't make it the most important one. Most of the damage in people's bodies doesn't happen in the gym. Nobody holds a deadlift for three hours, but plenty of people sit at a computer for ten. This book covers your whole day, not just the hour you spend exercising.

"There's No Such Thing as Perfect Posture"

You may hear this from some experts: there's no one ideal posture, because your body was built to move through its full range of motion. They're right that you have to move through

that range. This book is about doing it organized.

But moving through your full range doesn’t make every position along the way equally good for you. Muscles and connective tissue have a length where they work best. That’s documented science, not just my opinion. Your body will let you fold into plenty of awkward positions, because it can. That doesn’t mean you’re supposed to live there.

The Power Stance isn’t a pose you freeze in. It’s home base: the position you move out of and come back to, where your body asks the least of itself and gives you the most back.

What This Book Is Not

This book is not a workout program. Keep your trainer, your coach, your app, and your routine. Bring the Power Stance into whatever you already do, and watch how it changes.

This book is not medical advice. I'm not a doctor. If something hurts, get it looked at. This book is meant to work alongside your doctor, chiropractor, or physical therapist, not replace them. They fix the problem. What you learn here helps their work hold after you leave their office.

At the same time, this part doesn't take a medical degree to judge. I don't know of a doctor or practitioner anywhere — and certainly none who know my work

— who would tell you not to find your balance, or not to organize your body against gravity. Learning to find your center isn't going to harm you. And there is always a better version of yourself available, no matter where you're starting from — whether you're an athlete, recovering from surgery, living with chronic pain, using a wheelchair, or ninety years old. Everybody has a Power Stance. Yours may look a little different from someone else's. Finding it is the work this book helps you do.

One Promise

This is simple. It is not easy.

You'll understand the Power Stance in a few minutes. Your

muscles can already do it, right now. The hard part is your nervous system.

For years, your body has taken the path of least resistance — slumping, leaning, bracing in whatever way cost the least effort in the moment. Chairs, screens, soft couches, and flat floors made that path easy. Your nervous system learned it so well that it now treats the wrong way as normal, and it will fight you when you try to change it. It won’t give up an old habit just because you read a chapter.

Retraining it takes months of practice. That’s normal, and Chapter 4 explains exactly why.

Stay with it. The payoff is a body that finally works with you instead of against you.

Chapter 3 — Find Your Power Stance: Try It Now

This chapter is hands-on. Stand up, set up your phone, and do each step as you read it. It takes about ten minutes.

Before you start: Prop your phone up beside you and record yourself from the side. Don’t skip this. You won’t catch your own mistakes while you’re making them. Almost nobody does. Watch the video after each step. Skip the mirror. Turning your head to look at it twists your neck, and the rest of your body follows it out of line. Go slowly. If anything causes sharp pain, stop.

Your Power Stance is not a position someone else puts you in. You find it yourself, from the inside. These steps show you how to look.

Step 1 — Find Where Your Shoulders Really Are

Stand tall and relaxed.

Roll your shoulders forward as far as they will go. Then pull your shoulder blades back toward your spine as far as they will go. Do this slowly, back and forth, several times. Get a feel for the full range in both directions.

Now find the area roughly halfway between all the way forward and all the way back. That’s your middle zone. Notice I didn’t say

an exact middle point — there isn’t one. It’s a zone with some give and take on either side. And it will shift as you practice: the range you have today, with tight muscles and old habits, isn’t the full range your body is built for. As your range opens up, your middle zone moves with it.

Next, let go completely. Let your shoulders drop wherever they naturally sit when you aren’t thinking about them. Check your video. For most people, that everyday resting spot is well forward of the middle zone — the result of years of sitting, driving, and looking at screens.

The distance between those two spots is how far you have to

retrain. Don’t worry about fixing it yet. Just notice it.

Step 2 — Pull Your Shoulder Blades Back the Right Way

Hold your hands out in front of you, as if you’re gently holding a beach ball.

Keep your arms there. Now pull your shoulder blades back toward your spine, and down toward your back pockets. Back and down — both directions, together. The *down* part is the one almost everybody struggles with — not because they forget it, but because the muscle that does it has gone quiet. Years of rounded shoulders have left it stretched long, and your nervous system has

lost its connection to it. It doesn't know how to switch on anymore. Part of learning the Power Stance is waking it back up.

That's it. It's a small movement. The beach ball keeps you honest: with your arms out in front, your elbows can't swing behind you, so the right muscles have to do the job: the muscles between your shoulder blades pull them back, and the lower part of your trapezius, below your shoulder blades, pulls them down. That lower trapezius is the key muscle, and in most people it has gone quiet from years of rounded shoulders.

Check A — Where are your elbows? Almost everyone's first try pulls the elbows back behind

the ribs. That feels like retraction, but it’s a cheat. Big muscles are yanking the arms back and dragging the shoulder blades along. Real retraction happens with your elbows staying in front of your ribs.

Check B — Are your shoulders creeping up? The other common cheat is shrugging — shoulders rising toward your ears. That’s the muscles at the top of your shoulders taking over. Think *back and down*, not *up*.

Expect this step to be hard. It’s the hardest part of the whole Power Stance for almost everyone. You’ll feel real effort, and the shoulder blades still won’t close all the way. That isn’t weakness. It’s your nervous

system holding on to a habit it has had for decades. It will come. Chapter 4 explains why it takes time.

Step 3 — Lose the Rib

Keep your shoulder blades back. Now hook two fingers of each hand under your lowest front ribs — the ones that stick out a bit at the bottom of your rib cage.

When you pulled your shoulders back, your ribs probably lifted. Your fingers slide right under them. That’s normal.

Now, still holding your shoulder blades back, tighten your abs and pull those lower ribs down. Keep pulling until the ribs tuck in behind your stomach muscles and

your fingers can’t get underneath anymore. When you really know how to close your core, that bottom rib gets buried so deep you can’t even tell where the bone ends and the muscle around it begins. That’s the standard to work toward.

Notice what just happened below. You didn’t touch your pelvis. You didn’t think about your lower back. But both of them moved on their own, toward a straighter, more neutral line. The correction came from the top, and the rest of your body followed. That’s how this whole method works.

What you’re really doing: making your spine long. Here’s the bigger picture. Bad posture collapses the natural curves of

your spine. The twelve bones of your upper and middle back (your thoracic spine) round forward and sink down. The five bones of your lower back (your lumbar spine) sag or arch too far. Both curves get squashed, like a spring pressed down.

When your shoulder blades pull back and down while your core pulls your ribs down and in — those two parts working in opposite directions — you're stretching your spine long from both ends. Your upper back lifts out of its slump. Your lower back eases out of its sag. And the seven bones of your neck (your cervical spine), sitting at the very top of the totem pole, follow along: your head settles back on top of your

spine instead of hanging out in front, and your neck gets its natural curve back too. You stand taller, and your whole spine, from neck to lower back, gets back the healthy curves it was built to have. That's what the Power Stance is really building, one practice at a time.

The lower-back check. Here's a way to feel what your core is doing. Reach one hand behind you and rest your knuckles, or the back of your hand, against the middle of your lower back. That's easier on your shoulder than twisting your palm around. Feel the curve there — the small hollow above your belt line.

When your core is loose and open, your ribs lift, your pelvis tips

forward, and that curve deepens into a big arch. Your knuckles will feel a deep hollow. When you pull your ribs down and tighten your core, the curve shrinks back toward a gentle, natural shape. Your knuckles will feel the hollow get shallower.

You don’t want your lower back flat, and you don’t want it deeply arched. You want a small, natural curve that stays put. Practice changing it on purpose — deeper, then shallower — so you learn what’s controlling it. Notice that the curve changes because of what your top half is doing: your ribs and your core.

You can do this check standing, standing with your back against a wall (slide a hand into the gap

between your lower back and the wall), or lying on your back on the floor. Each one lets you feel the depth of that curve and how you can change it.

You now have two of the three parts: shoulder blades back, and core tight.

Step 4 — Let Your Hip Find the Lean

With your shoulder blades back and your core tight, you'll feel your body want to tip forward, just a degree or two. Let it.

First, a few words that confuse almost everyone. People use *hip*, *pelvis*, and *pelvic* as if they all mean the same thing. They don't.

- Your **pelvis** is the bony ring at the base of your spine. It's made of four parts: a left and a right hip bone (also called the pelvic bones), plus the sacrum and the tailbone (coccyx) — the bottom of your spine — joining them at the back. *Pelvis* is the name of the whole ring.
- **Pelvic** is the describing word. It means "having to do with the pelvis." Your *pelvic bones* are the left and right bones of your pelvis. A *pelvic tilt* is your pelvis tilting. So "pelvis" and "pelvic" aren't two different body parts. One is the name, and the other describes something about it — the same way *nose* and *nasal* go together.

- Your **hip socket** is the cup on the outside of each pelvic bone. The ball at the top of your thigh bone (the femur) sits in that cup. The femur is a separate bone — it isn't part of the pelvis. It only meets the pelvis there, at the hip joint. That ball-and-socket joint is what this book calls the **femoral hip socket**.

A small wonder of engineering. Your thigh bone isn't a straight stick. Picture a walking cane: a long, straight shaft, and at the top, a short neck that angles off to the side, with a round ball on the end instead of a handle. That ball is what sits in your hip socket.

Your knee and your elbow mostly work like a door hinge — open,

close. Your hip is a ball in a socket, so it can swing forward and back, out to the side and in, and twist. And that little jog in the bone adds something special.

Picture a lollipop with its candy sitting in a cup. If the stick comes straight out of the candy, twisting the candy just spins the stick in place. Now bend the stick right near the candy, and twist again. The long end of the stick sweeps around in a wide arc, like a crank handle. That’s your thigh bone. Because of that bend, the long part of your thigh bone doesn’t pivot at its own tip — it swings around a point off to its side. So every movement at your hip, even a small twist, carries the whole thigh bone through space on a

curved path. A small turn of the ball in the socket swings your knee across a wide arc. A straight stick on a swivel could never do that.

The jog also holds the thigh bone away from the edge of the socket, giving the leg more room to move. And it works like a lever, giving the muscles on the side of your hip more power to hold your pelvis level every time you stand on one leg — which is every step you take. To control all of this, around twenty muscles and a web of connective tissue cross the hip from every direction — and each one, pulling from its own angle, swings the thigh bone along its own curved path.

That’s what makes the hip so capable — and so easy to throw out of balance. With that many directions to move and that many attachments pulling on it, the hip can quietly shift and compensate for problems above and below it without you ever noticing. It’s also why the hip is best left to find its own balance once the top half of your body is organized, instead of being forced into place.

Here’s the best part: you don’t need to understand any of that to use it. You don’t need to know the angle of the bone or the names of twenty muscles. When you find your neutral Power Stance, all of that complicated machinery settles into the simple path it was designed to work in — and every

piece does its job properly, on its own. The body is complex. Organizing it is simple. That's the whole idea of this book.

Two different places can move down here. This is the part that makes the hip so confusing, so take it slowly.

1. **Your pelvis can tilt.** It rocks forward or backward, and the curve of your lower back changes with it — more arched, or flatter. You already set this in Step 3. When you pulled your ribs down, your pelvis and lower back moved toward neutral on their own.
2. **Your femoral hip socket can pivot.** The ball of the thigh bone turns in its cup,

and your whole upper body tips forward as one solid piece. Your lower back doesn’t change shape at all.

These two movements are different, but they aren’t completely separate. When your pelvis tilts, the ball of your thigh bone also turns a little in its socket. Every joint in your body moves a little whenever you ask your body to do something. The goal isn’t to freeze some parts and move others. The goal is to learn the best path — the way all these joints work together, in the right order, so no single one takes more than its share. For the Power Stance lean, that means the curve in your lower back stays where your core set it, and the tipping

happens mostly at the femoral hip socket.

Picture the old dipping bird desk toy. It tips forward and back around one pivot point, and it never bends in the middle. Your upper body is the bird. Your femoral hip socket is the pivot.

Why lean forward at all? Because your body is built for it. Your eyes face forward. Your knees bend forward. Your hands do almost all their work in front of you. Your ankle sits near the back of your foot, with the rest of the foot reaching out in front. Your body’s natural balance point isn’t a perfectly straight up-and-down line. It’s a slight forward lean.

The hip check. Use the same lower-back check from Step 3. Keep your knuckles on your lower back and tip forward a little. The curve under your knuckles should stay about the same — the shape your core set in Step 3. If the arch suddenly deepens, your core has let go and your pelvis tipped forward. If your back rounds out, you bent your spine instead of pivoting. Tighten your core again and try once more, letting the tip come mostly from the crease where your thigh meets your body. When your back holds its shape under your knuckles while your whole upper body tilts, you've found the pivot.

The good news: you don't have to steer it. Your femoral hip

socket works together with your knees, your ankles, and your feet. As you lean, your knees unlock and bend a little, and your ankles adjust. How much each one bends depends on the ground you're standing on, the shoes you're wearing, the arches of your feet, and what's pulling on you — gravity, or the weight in your hands. Your body sorts this out on its own, by instinct, to keep you balanced. Your job is the top half: shoulder blades and core. Get those right, and the hip, knees, and ankles find their balance underneath you.

You'll feel this most when you actually move. Reach for a cup on a counter and notice it. The heavier the job, the more your

hip, knees, and ankles bend to meet it. The lighter the job, the less they move.

Step 5 — The Squeeze Test

Now put all three together. Shoulder blades back. Core tight. Slight lean from the hip.

Then squeeze everything as hard as you can. Core as tight as it goes. Shoulder blades held. Lean held.

If you've found your Power Stance, you can squeeze at full strength with zero pain or discomfort anywhere in your body.

If something hurts, pulls, or pinches, you aren't there yet.

Adjust — a little more or less lean, shoulder blades a little lower, ribs a little further down — and try again. Your body will tell you when it's right.

This is exactly how I found mine after breaking my back: shifting a little at a time until the pain turned off like a dial.

One important note: if you've found what feels like the right position and one spot still hurts, it may be something separate — an old injury or a problem that needs its own attention. The Power Stance doesn't cause that pain. It reveals it. That's useful information. Get it checked by a professional.

How It Should Feel

The first time, the Power Stance will probably feel stiff and overdone. You may feel like a brand new army recruit who doesn't know what to do with his shoulders. That feeling is real, and it's temporary. The position isn't wrong. It's just unfamiliar.

As your body adapts, the stiffness fades. You stop looking like the new recruit and start looking like someone who simply moves well.

Standing at Rest Is Different

The Power Stance is not how you stand around doing nothing.

When you're just standing still — waiting, looking out at the horizon — it's fine to stand tall and

relaxed, knees straight, belly soft, ribs a little lifted. That’s about as close to resting as standing gets. There’s no load to organize against.

The Power Stance turns on the moment you move or carry something. Even reaching for a cup, your core tightens a little on its own and a light version of your Power Stance starts to form. The bigger the job, the more of it you use. That’s what Chapter 2 meant by the three states.

How to Practice

You don’t need a gym for this. You need a few spare seconds, a few times a day.

- Thirty seconds while you wait in line at the grocery store.
- While the coffee brews.
- At a red light.
- Before you pick anything up.

Your nervous system doesn’t care where you practice. Every correct repetition builds the same new pattern. The more often you practice, the sooner it becomes automatic.

Keep the full, hard squeeze brief. That’s for practice and testing, not for holding all day.

Quick Checklist

1. Phone: record yourself from the side, and watch it back.

2. Shoulders: find your middle zone, then notice your habit.
3. Beach ball: shoulder blades back and down, elbows in front of your ribs, no shrug.
4. Ribs: pull them down until your fingers can’t get under.
5. Hip: tip forward slightly from the hip socket; your back keeps its shape.
6. Squeeze test: full squeeze, zero pain.

If it doesn’t click today, that’s normal. It didn’t click for anyone on day one. The next chapter tells you why, and what to expect.

Chapter 4 — So Easy, Yet So Hard

Easy to Understand

You just read the whole Power Stance in one chapter. Shoulder blades back. Core tight. A slight lean from the hip. Three parts. You understood it in a few minutes.

Your muscles can already do it, too. Nothing about the Power Stance needs special strength. There’s no heavy weight to lift and nothing to stretch first.

So why doesn’t everybody already stand this way?

Hard to Do

Here’s a test I’ve run in gyms more times than I can count. I walk up to someone, hand them a five-pound cable handle, and say: “Hold your arms straight out in front of you. Don’t bend your elbows. Just pull your shoulder blades back.”

Almost every time, they bend their elbows.

They heard me. They understood me. They want to do it right. And their body does the old thing anyway. The brain does what it has always done.

That’s what you’re up against. Not your muscles. Your nervous system.

I’d make a gentleman’s bet on it with anyone. And the reason the

elbows bend is worth knowing, because it explains a lot about why bad posture hurts.

Posture Muscles and Work Muscles

Your body has two kinds of muscle fiber, built for two different jobs.

Posture muscles are built for endurance. They work quietly, at low effort, for hours at a time without getting tired. Their job is to hold you upright all day. Think of a steady walker who can go all day long. Scientists sometimes call this *red* or *slow-twitch* fiber.

Work muscles are built for strength and speed. They're the ones you can see in the mirror — the big muscles you use to lift,

pull, push, and do chores. They're powerful, but they tire out quickly. Think of a sprinter: fast and strong, but not for long. This is often called *white* or *fast-twitch* fiber.

Every muscle has some of both. But some muscles are mostly made for posture, and some are mostly made for work.

Here's where it goes wrong. When you're out of posture, your posture muscles go quiet — and your body still has to hold you up somehow. So it borrows the work muscles to do a posture muscle's job. They can do it for a while, but they were never built to hold a position all day. They get tired, tight, and sore. That's a big part of why people with poor posture

ache, stiffen up, and cramp, even on days they didn't do anything hard.

Think of your posture muscles as doormen. Their job is to open the door, over and over, all day long, for everyone walking in and out. Light work, done steadily, for hours. They're great at it. Now imagine asking those same doormen to unload a truck through the doorway, all day. They can't do it. And even the big, strong movers from the truck couldn't keep it up for eight hours straight either. Bad posture puts every muscle in that position — asked to do a job it wasn't built for, for far too long.

That's also what happens when someone bends their elbows in my

five-pound test. Pulling the elbows back behind the body uses the latissimus dorsi — the large muscle running down the side of your back, one of the strongest pulling muscles you have. It's a work muscle, and it's very good at faking the look of "shoulders back." Meanwhile, the real posture muscles — the lower part of your trapezius and the muscles between your shoulder blades — never switch on.

A big part of learning the Power Stance is teaching your body to use the right muscles for the job: posture muscles for posture, and work muscles for work.

Your Nervous System Took the Easy Road

Your nervous system is the wiring that runs your body. It sends signals from your brain to your muscles and back again, all day long. One of its biggest jobs is to make everyday movement automatic, so you don’t have to think about every step.

It learns from whatever you repeat. And it has no way of knowing whether what you repeat is good for you. It just notices what you do most, and makes that the default.

For years — for most people, decades — what you repeated was the path of least resistance. Slumping in a chair. Leaning on one hip while you stand. Rounding forward over a phone or a steering wheel. Heaving yourself

up off a soft couch. Modern life made all of this easy, and your body did what bodies do: it took the easy road.

Your nervous system learned that road so well that it now treats it as normal. When you try to change it, your nervous system pushes back. The correct position feels wrong. Not because it is wrong — because it is unfamiliar.

Why the Pieces Fight Each Other

You felt this in Chapter 2: pull your shoulder blades back and your ribs pop up; pull your ribs down and your shoulders slide forward. You fix one, and the other pops out, like a game of whack-a-mole.

That isn’t a flaw in you. It’s a nervous system that has only ever moved the front of your body as one piece, now being asked to move two parts in opposite directions at once. Everyone figures it out eventually. It just takes practice.

The Shoulder Blades Are the Stubborn One

Of the three parts, the shoulder blades will test your patience the most.

The core usually responds fairly quickly. The hip mostly takes care of itself once the other two are in place. But the muscles that pull your shoulder blades back and down have spent years being skipped over while other, bigger

muscles did their job. They don’t come back overnight.

I once worked with a woman who brought her husband in for his first session. We spent most of an hour on one thing: pulling the shoulder blades back. I stood behind him with my hands on his shoulder blades. I could not get one centimeter of movement out of either one. He wasn’t in pain. He wasn’t fighting me. His nervous system simply had no map for that movement. Years of rounded shoulders had locked those bones in place as if they were frozen.

That hour wasn’t a failure. It was the first hour of a process that takes months. His brain now knew

that territory existed. That's where every change starts.

The Ping Pong Effect

Once you can hold your shoulder blades back with no weight at all, you'll be ready for something light — a cable handle, a resistance band. And the moment you do, it will feel like you've learned nothing.

The tiniest bit of weight, and your elbows want to drift behind you again. Your shoulders roll forward. The old pattern is back.

This isn't a strength problem. Your muscles can easily handle that little bit of weight. It's a recognition problem. The instant your nervous system feels any

load at all, it grabs the old, familiar pattern without checking whether the new one could have handled it.

So you reset and try again. You get it. You lose it. You get it again. I call this the Ping Pong Effect — bouncing back and forth between right and wrong. It happens again each time the weight goes up a little. It even happens after a couple of days off.

None of this means you’re failing. Every bounce is your nervous system being trained. That back-and-forth is what learning looks like.

Turning the Ship

Think about a big ship. Turn the wheel, and the ship doesn't respond right away. It keeps drifting in its old direction for a while before it finally comes around.

Your posture works the same way. That's why, when I start a new client, I have them hold the Power Stance fully — shoulder blades all the way back, core squeezed hard — even when the task doesn't really need that much. It's deliberate over-steering. A half-hearted correction isn't strong enough to overpower a habit that has run for decades.

Once the new pattern is truly learned, you stop over-steering. You use as much of the Power Stance as the moment calls for,

and no more. But while you're learning, go all the way.

Light First, Every Time

Your nervous system doesn't learn from going hard right away. It learns from repeating something light, over and over, until it knows the way.

So every new movement starts the same way. First a dry run, with no weight at all, just to walk through it. Then a light run, with a weight so easy it's almost silly. Only after your body can follow the pattern without a second thought do you add more. Never jump straight to hard.

Why? Because fear and strain block learning. When something

feels heavy, fast, or risky, your nervous system stops paying attention to the new pattern and grabs the old one, which is the Ping Pong Effect all over again. The same goes for embarrassment. If you're worried about how you look, part of your attention is spent on that instead of on your body. Light, calm, and private is how new patterns stick.

This doesn't clash with turning the ship. Go all the way with your form: shoulder blades fully set, core fully closed. Stay light with the weight and the speed. Full form, light load. That's how you learn it.

Three Things I Tell Every New Client

Before we start, I tell every new client three things. Then I keep telling them, all session long. Some get tired of hearing it. Some get embarrassed when people nearby overhear. I repeat it anyway, because these are the three things that make people quit when nobody warns them.

1. You'll get frustrated. You'll understand exactly what to do, and your body still won't do it. That's your nervous system, not you. It's the Ping Pong Effect, and it passes.

2. Good posture will feel worse at first. Your muscles, and the fascia around them, have shaped themselves to your old posture. Some got parked too long, and some too short. Asking them back

to their natural length feels uncomfortable before it feels good. Comfortable and correct aren't the same thing yet.

3. You'll find new aches. Your body pushes back when it's moved out of its old comfort zone. Some aches are fine. A mild, dull annoyance in a joint while you hold a position without weight usually means: ease up a little, breathe, relax into it, then squeeze again. Other aches mean something is wrong: too much load, or your position broke down. Chapter 11 explains the difference.

One rule goes with all three: keep talking to me. Don't hide pain, and don't work through it. Tell

me, so we can figure out which kind it is.

And one more thing I've learned. Plenty of the aches people blame on training come from somewhere else: reaching awkwardly in the garden, hauling a heavy load of wet laundry out of the washer, falling asleep slumped at the computer. When something hurts, look at your whole day, not just your last session.

How Long It Takes

With regular, focused practice, it usually takes about four months before the new pattern sticks.

And it doesn't come gradually. It clicks, like a light switch. My clients can't do it, and can't do it,

and can’t do it — and then one day, it’s there. They do a clean repetition, and the next one is clean too, and it stays. The weight that seemed impossible a week ago is suddenly easy, because the weight was never the problem. The nervous system was.

Coaches have an old saying: it takes a couple thousand repetitions to learn something new, and many thousands more to replace a bad habit with a good one. Nobody has measured an exact number, but anyone who has coached for long knows the idea is true. It is much easier to teach someone who knows nothing than to retrain someone whose body already learned it wrong.

A Second Set of Eyes

Here’s the tricky part about retraining yourself: you can’t feel your own habit. Your nervous system tells you the old position is straight, because that’s what it’s used to. That’s why the phone video, the beach ball, and the finger-under-the-rib check in Chapter 3 matter so much. They let you see what you can’t feel.

I watched this happen at a bar not long ago. A couple asked what I do, and like clockwork, the wife sat up straight. I showed her the right way. Then I asked her husband to catch her whenever she got it wrong, and I told him exactly what to watch for: her elbows sliding back behind her body. He sat three feet away,

studied her shoulder blades, and told me she had it right. Her elbows were behind her the whole time. I pointed it out four times before he finally saw it.

That’s how invisible this habit is. Not just to you. To the person watching you, too. If you don’t have a trained eye nearby, film yourself from the side with your phone. The camera doesn’t share your habit.

A trained eye helps even more. When I work with someone, I can see the elbows drift or the ribs lift before they feel it, and correct it on the spot. That speeds things up. But whether you practice alone or with help, the process is the same: understand it, practice it on purpose, and repeat it until

your body does it without being asked.

Why It’s Worth It

Simple, not easy. That’s the Power Stance.

But here’s some bad news that’s actually good news. This book is going to show you that you’ve been doing some things wrong for most of your life. That’s good news, because it can be fixed.

When you’ve done something the wrong way for decades, the fix doesn’t have to be fancy to make a big difference. It just has to be right. And right now, you’re a beginner. Beginners have the biggest gap between where they are and where they could be, so

beginners see the biggest changes, and see them fast. That's what I watch happen with most of my clients. The hard part is real, but so are the early rewards.

The good news is that you're not asking your body to do something unnatural. You're asking it to go back to what it was built for, before chairs and screens and soft couches taught it otherwise. Watch a toddler squat down to pick up a toy — back relaxed, balanced, no effort at all. Nobody taught that child. It was already there.

It's still in you. It's just buried under years of habit. The rest of this book shows you why it's worth digging out.

Chapter 5 — Living With Gravity

The One Thing That Never Lets Up

Gravity pulls on you every second of your life. Standing, sitting, walking, sleeping, lifting, stretching — it never takes a break. You can’t turn it off. You can only decide how well you’re organized against it.

That’s really what this whole book is about. Not exercise. Not even posture, exactly. It’s about your relationship with gravity, all day long.

The Line on the Chart

You may have seen a chart of the “line of gravity” — a straight line drawn from the ear, down through the shoulder, hip, knee, and ankle of someone standing perfectly upright. It’s accurate. But it only describes one moment: a person standing completely still, doing nothing.

Real life isn’t lived that way. The instant you do anything — lift a finger to write with a pencil, reach for a cup, take a step — that line changes. Your body shifts. And before your arm ever moves, your core tightens on its own.

So think of that line as a starting point, not a place to live. Standing still on that line, your bones are stacked on top of each other and your body is resting — knees

locked, muscles doing almost nothing. That's correct for standing still. But almost none of us spend our day there.

Your Power Stance starts right from that line. You begin almost exactly in that stacked position, and then everything tips forward just a couple of degrees, from the hip socket. That small tip takes you off your stacked bones and out of rest. Your knees soften. Your muscles switch on. Now you're organized and ready to move. That's where you learn and assemble your Power Stance.

The Switch You Can't Turn Off

That automatic tightening is one of the most important things in

this book, so let’s slow down on it.

Picture yourself standing at rest, bones stacked, knees locked — like a hunter-gatherer standing tall, scanning the horizon. Your muscles are doing almost nothing. Now think about picking up a coffee mug. In the few thousandths of a second before your hand even moves, your nervous system switches on your deepest core muscles — the belt of muscle around your waist, the small muscles along your spine, the muscles of your pelvic floor, and the rest of that deep team. It builds you a stable base first, because nothing can lift, pull, or reach without something steady to anchor from.

Scientists have a name for this: an *anticipatory postural adjustment*. Your nervous system knows the movement is coming, so it braces your middle before the movement starts. I watched this happen in bodies for years before I learned that science had already named it.

Here's why it matters so much: **this switch is the on-off point between rest and movement, and you can't get around it.** It happens automatically, every time, in every body. So I built the Power Stance right on top of it. The Power Stance starts at that exact moment — the instant your body leaves rest and gets ready to move. It doesn't fight what your nervous system is already doing. It takes that automatic switch and

organizes it: shoulder blades back and down, core closed, the lean from the hip. It’s built on a fact about your body that you can’t change.

When the Switch Misfires

As we’ve seen, the human body is a wonderful, adaptive, amazing thing. But when it gets injured — whether it was our own fault or pure accident — even its best systems can start to fail.

This switch is no exception. Research has found that in many people with long-lasting low back pain, it fires late. For that first instant of every movement, the spine is left without the protection it’s supposed to have.

I’ve lived the other side of this, too. Remember the story from Chapter 1? When my old back injury flares up, the bones that healed out of place pinch a nerve, and the pain puts me on the floor. As long as I lie perfectly still, nothing hurts. But the moment I try to lift my arm even a few inches to reach my phone, the switch fires — my core tightens on its own, before my arm ever moves — and that one automatic squeeze sets off the nerve and throws me right back into excruciating pain. Maybe that’s my body’s way of keeping me from moving and hurting myself further. But it shows how an injury can turn a system built to protect you into one that hurts you.

Injuries cause the body's mechanisms to fail — firing late, firing too hard, or firing into pain. That's one more reason to practice good posture every day: so these systems keep working the way they were designed, on time and without pain, for as long as possible.

Built to Work in Front of You

Think about where you actually use your body. You cook in front of you. You write in front of you. You carry groceries in front of you. You lift a child, push a cart, and type on a keyboard in front of you. Almost nothing you do all day happens behind your back.

Your body is built for that. As you saw in Chapter 3, your eyes face forward, your knees bend forward, and your ankle sits at the back of your foot so the rest of the foot can support a forward lean. You were designed to work slightly forward of that straight line on the chart, pivoting at the hip socket, with the knees and ankles adjusting underneath.

So leaning forward isn't the problem. How you lean forward is.

Two Ways to Lean Forward

There are two ways your body can get in front of itself.

The organized way is the Power Stance. Shoulder blades back, core tight, and the whole upper

body tipping forward as one solid piece from the hip socket. The knees and ankles bend to match. Your structure carries the load together.

The collapsed way is what most people do. Instead of pivoting at the hip, the body bends wherever it's easiest. The shoulder blades slide forward — they're the most mobile bones in the upper body, so they go first. The upper back rounds. The lower back sags or arches. And the head, which weighs about as much as a bowling ball, drifts forward on the neck.

That's the path of least resistance, and it's the one your nervous system learned. It takes less effort in the moment. But it hands the

load to joints, discs, and tissues that were never meant to carry it — a little more every day, for years.

The Totem Pole

Picture your body as a totem pole. The higher up the pole you push, the more it bends everything underneath.

Try this. Stand still and pull your shoulders back, without moving anything else. Feel how your whole body’s balance shifts, even though your feet never moved. Now let your shoulders roll forward again. Everything shifts the other way. A small change at the top of the pole moves the entire structure below it.

That’s why your shoulders are so important. They sit high on the pole, and they’re the easiest part of your upper body to let slide out of place. When they drift forward, your head follows, your upper back rounds, and everything underneath has to adjust to keep you from tipping over — your lower back, your pelvis, your hips, your knees, all the way down to your feet.

Damage Builds From the Ground Up. The Fix Starts at the Top.

I believe a lot of bad posture starts at the ground. For almost all of human history, people walked barefoot on dirt, grass, sand, and rock. Now we spend our

lives on flat, hard floors, in cushioned shoes, sitting in chairs. That slow change works its way up the body over a lifetime.

So a lot of trainers and therapists start the fix at the bottom too. Fix the feet. Fix the pelvis. Then work upward.

In my experience, that doesn't hold. Where the damage started and where the fix has to start are two different questions. By the time you're an adult, your whole body has rearranged itself around shoulders and a head that sit forward. Fix the feet or the pelvis first, and the rest of your body still has to balance under shoulders that are still three inches forward. So it shifts around to find a new balance — and when

you finally do fix the shoulders later, everything has to shift all over again.

A Tangled Web

Here’s what makes this tricky: the damage doesn’t only come from one direction.

Maybe it started with your shoes. A narrow toe box, a raised heel, or years of hard floors changed the way you stand on your feet. Your arches changed how your ankles sit. Your ankles changed your knees, your knees changed your hips, and so on up the line — until one day your shoulders and head are sitting forward, and you have no idea it began at your feet.

Or maybe it started at the top — years at a desk, rounding over a keyboard — and worked its way down until your feet started paying for it.

Most of the time, it's both, tangled together over decades. Oh, what a tangled web we weave. And no two people's webs are the same. Your body has hundreds of joints, arches, and connective tissues, and every one of them adapted to your own life, your own job, your own shoes, your own injuries.

So the fix isn't one exercise for everyone. It's learning to untangle your own web in the right order — the reverse of how it was built.

Where do you start untangling? At the top — even when the problem

began at your feet. There are two reasons.

The first is gravity. However your web got tangled — from below, from the middle, or from the top — one fact never changes: gravity pulls down on everything, the same way, all the time. And the taller a structure is, and the narrower its base, the more easily gravity can tip whatever sits up high. You're a tall structure balanced on two small feet. Whatever is highest on your totem pole has the most power to pull everything below it out of line.

The second is what sits up there. Your shoulders and your head are heavy, and your shoulders are the most mobile part of your upper body. When

they drift forward, they act like a long lever, and gravity uses that lever to drag the rest of you further off balance.

So no matter where the problem started, I start fixing it from the top down. Pull the top of the totem pole back toward your center line, and in my observation, everything below it starts to settle back toward neutral on its own. You saw this happen in Chapter 3: you pulled your ribs down, and your pelvis and lower back followed without you touching them.

That’s why the Power Stance is built from the top down. Shoulder blades first. Core second. The hip, knees, and ankles follow.

What Holds You Up: Two Systems Working Together

So what does “organized” actually mean? Your body holds itself up with two different systems, working together.

System One: Tensegrity

This is where the word from Chapter 2 comes in: **tensegrity**.

Tensegrity is a real principle from engineering. It describes a structure that stays strong because of balance between pushing and pulling, not because one stiff part holds everything up.

- **Your bones push.** They’re the solid pieces that resist being squeezed.

- **Your muscles, tendons, ligaments, and connective tissue pull.** They're the cables, holding the bones in place from every direction at once.

When that pull is balanced, your bones don't grind against each other. Your joints are suspended — floating, held in place by tension from all sides — so they can glide and move freely. That's tensegrity: strength through balanced tension.

System Two: The Packed Barrel

Your middle has a second way of holding its shape. Your deep core muscles wrap around your waist like the hoop on a barrel. And

inside that barrel, your organs pack the space, pushing outward.

Think of an empty duffel bag. It's floppy — you can fold it up and stuff it in a drawer. Now pack that same bag tight with laundry and zip it shut. It stands up on its own. The fabric didn't change. What changed is what's inside it, pushing out against what's wrapped around it.

In your body, your organs are the laundry — packed into your middle like socks, shirts, and underwear stuffed into that bag. And here's what makes your body better than any duffel bag: the bag is alive. When you close your core, those muscles squeeze down tight around everything packed inside. The tighter they squeeze

around that packed middle, the more solid the whole thing becomes.

Or think of the steel posts set in concrete to keep cars off a sidewalk. A hollow steel post can be bent if a car hits it hard enough. Fill that same post with concrete, and it won't bend. When your core squeezes down around your packed organs, your torso works like that filled post — rigid and strong, protecting your spine at its center.

Or picture an unopened can of soda. You can't crush it in your hand, because the pressure inside holds the walls up. Pop the top, and the same can crushes easily.

Both, Together

Tensegrity keeps your whole frame balanced and your joints floating. The packed barrel makes your middle rigid when you need it. The Power Stance brings both into play at once: shoulder blades and core set the tension, and a closed core seals the barrel.

Your True Core

When most people hear “core,” they think of the six-pack on the front of the belly. That’s only the outside layer.

Your true core is a team of deeper muscles that wrap around your middle like a canister:

- **The transverse abdominis** — the deepest belly muscle, wrapping around your waist

like a wide belt. It’s the hoop on the barrel.

- **The multifidus** — small, strong muscles running along the back of your spine, linking one vertebra to the next, all the way down your back. They hold each bone of your spine steady, one level at a time.
- **The diaphragm** on top, the muscle you breathe with.
- **The pelvic floor** on the bottom.

The multifidus is the one almost nobody has heard of, and it matters a great deal. Those small muscles need your spine in a neutral position to do their job, at the right length and in the right place. When your posture

collapses — shoulders forward, lower back slumped or over-arched — the vertebrae shift, and the multifidus gets pulled out of position with them. Research has found that in many people with long-lasting low back pain, these muscles shrink and weaken, often right around the lowest part of the spine, the area doctors call L4 and L5.

You've probably heard someone say their L4 or L5 is "compressed." In my experience, that's rarely the whole story. Something let those bones get squeezed in the first place. A spine whose deep support muscles have been pulled out of position for years has lost part of

its protection, so the load lands on the discs and joints instead.

You don’t need to be a doctor to fix this. When you organize your body into balance, your spine returns toward neutral, and those deep muscles get back the position they need to work. That’s one of many hidden things that start to heal on their own once your structure is right — things you’d never know were happening.

And the team doesn’t stop there. Your diaphragm anchors to your spine at the top of your lower back. Right under its back edge starts the **psoas** — a long, deep muscle anchored at the back of you, on the sides of your lower spine. From there it travels

straight through the middle of your body to the front, passes over the front of your pelvis, and attaches to the inside of your upper thigh bone. Wrapped around all of it is **fascia**, a thin, strong web of connective tissue that ties every one of these muscles to its neighbors. Science has only begun to understand how much fascia does, and it turns out to do far more than anyone used to think.

So your breathing muscle, your deep spine muscles, your belly, the floor of your pelvis, and the muscle that lifts your leg are all linked together. Picture a Broadway orchestra: dozens of players, every one of them needed, all following the same

conductor. When everyone plays together, the music is beautiful. When a few players are out of place, you can hear it right away.

Your posture is the conductor. You don’t have to learn every instrument. You just need a few fundamentals — how to place your body into a neutral Power Stance — and the orchestra starts playing together. From there, you grow with experience.

How Gravity Wins

You’ve probably seen a video of a building being demolished. It isn’t the explosion that brings it down. The crew removes a few key supports, and gravity does the rest.

Gravity is trying to do the same thing to you every day, with no explosives needed. It just looks for the first thing that's out of place. For most people, that's the shoulders. Once they slide forward, leverage takes over and pulls everything below them out of line too. That's why so many people's lower backs hurt: the lower back isn't the source. It's carrying the load of everything that collapsed above it.

Why We Get Shorter

A picture is worth a thousand words — and so is a picture in your mind. So picture this.

Most of us notice, somewhere along the way, that we're not as

tall as we used to be. Some of that comes with age, as bones naturally thin. But a big part of it is posture, and it happens in several ways at once:

1. **The curves collapse.** When your upper back rounds and your lower back sags, your spine bends into deeper curves. A bent spine is a shorter spine.
2. **The discs get squeezed.** Between each bone of your spine sits a soft, cushioning disc. When the bones are stacked out of line, those discs get pressed down unevenly, year after year, and they lose height.
3. **The muscles lock you down.** When your posture

muscles give up and your work muscles take over, those work muscles get short, tight, and tired — and they hold you in that shorter shape.

4. **The fascia molds around it.** Fascia, the web wrapped around all of it, slowly shapes itself to whatever position you live in most — and then helps hold you there.

Now picture what else is happening. Your muscles are getting weaker. Your joints are wearing faster. Your nervous system is more stressed. And think about everything that has to pass through and alongside your spine — the nerves, the blood vessels, the lymph vessels that carry waste away. When the spine

sinks and bends out of place, those passageways get crowded and pinched, like a garden hose kinked in a few places. Your body's delivery and cleanup systems don't flow the way they should.

There's good news, too. Your bones are alive. They respond to the loads you put on them. When you load your body well — with good posture, spreading the weight evenly through your bones and joints instead of grinding on one spot — your bones get the signal to stay strong, and they can even build strength. Bad posture does the opposite: it overloads one small area and leaves the rest without the healthy load it needs.

Nobody can stop aging, and conditions like osteoporosis speed up bone loss for some people. But good posture, combined with the right kind of loading, can help slow a lot of this down. If you already have osteoporosis, ask your doctor what kind and how much loading is safe for you. The doctors I've worked with have encouraged their osteoporosis patients to train with me, because everything I do is slow, organized, and methodical — built to load the body safely, never to rush it.

Hold that picture in your mind the next time you slump. Sitting upright, standing upright, and doing your daily tasks in your Power Stance isn't much to ask. It

just has to become a habit your body remembers.

You Can Do What a Building Can't

Here's the difference between you and that building: you're alive.

A building is as strong as the day it was finished. It can't tighten its own cables. Your body can. Every time you pull your shoulder blades back and tighten your core, you're tightening the cables and packing the barrel. You're turning your muscles and the pressure inside you into a strong, protective shell around your spine — a shell your belly and lower back don't otherwise have.

That’s what you’re really doing when you use your Power Stance. It isn’t a posture. It’s a shell. And it’s how you stay standing while gravity keeps pulling.

Chapter 6 — The Three States

You’re Always in One of Them

Every moment of your life, awake or asleep, your body is in one of three states. There’s no fourth option, and nobody opts out.

- **The Active State** — real effort against real load.
- **The Transitional State** — ordinary, everyday movement.
- **The Restorative State** — true rest.

These three states exist because of gravity. How much gravity is asking of you right now decides

which state you're in. And which state you're in decides how much of your Power Stance you need.

The Active State

The Active State is any time your body is working hard against gravity or a load. Lifting a heavy box into the back of a truck. A hard set at the gym. Shoveling snow. Carrying a child up the stairs. Moving furniture.

Here, the Power Stance is fully assembled. Shoulder blades back, core tight, the lean from the hip — all working at full strength to protect your spine and joints while they carry the load.

The Active State doesn't only happen in the gym. It depends on

how heavy something is *to you*. Carrying one light grocery bag in from the car is ordinary movement. Loading five bags onto one arm, the way plenty of people do without a second thought, is real load. That deserves your full Power Stance, the same as a barbell would.

Even in the Active State, you don't hold the full Power Stance every second. Watch a boxer between flurries: he loosens up, takes a deep breath, then locks back in the moment he needs to. Skilled people are always making small, quick adjustments like that. The difference between a trained person and an untrained one isn't that the trained person never lets go. It's that they always know

when they've let go, and they know how to get back.

The Transitional State

The Transitional State is most of your waking day. Walking to the kitchen. Reaching for a cup. Bending to tie your shoe. Getting in and out of the car. Stretching.

Here, the Power Stance is used lightly — a little bit of shoulder, a little bit of core, just enough for the moment. Sometimes it barely shows up at all.

This is also the safest place to practice. A mistake here costs you very little. A mistake under a heavy load can hurt you. That's why I tell people to start learning the Power Stance in the ordinary

moments of the day, not in the gym. Reach for the coffee pot with your shoulder blades set. Get up from your chair with your core tight. Those small moments add up to thousands of practice repetitions a week.

Standing still is part of the Transitional State too, even though it looks like rest. When you stand tall and relaxed — knees straight, looking out at the horizon — your bones do most of the work. But small muscles in your shoulders, ankles, and feet are still quietly working to keep you balanced. It’s light work, but it isn’t zero.

The Restorative State

The Restorative State is true rest: lying down, sleeping, resting in bed after an injury.

This is the one state where gravity stops asking your muscles to hold you up. Lying flat, nothing has to balance. Your muscles can fully let go, and your body gets to do its repair work — healing tissue, rehydrating your joints, and locking in the new movement patterns you practiced during the day.

Here, the Power Stance switches off completely. Instead, you use simple *techniques* to rest well: a pillow between your knees if you sleep on your side, a pillow under your knees if you sleep on your back, slow, deep belly breathing. You choose them, and you set

them up before you drift off. Chapter 10 covers this in more detail.

The Gateway

The moment you leave rest is one of the most important moments of your day. I call it **the gateway**.

You're lying in bed. You decide to get up. The instant you move, you're no longer in the Restorative State. This is where people hurt themselves — heaving themselves straight up off their back, rounding and twisting, with a body that was completely relaxed a second ago.

Cross the gateway on purpose. Before you move, set a light Power Stance. Then roll to your

side and push yourself up from there. It takes two extra seconds, and it protects your back every single morning for the rest of your life.

A Tool and a Technique

There’s a difference between the Power Stance and the other things this book teaches, and it’s worth knowing.

The Power Stance is a tool. Once it’s learned and set in place, it runs on its own. It protects you without you having to manage it.

A technique is something you choose and control the whole time. A stretch. Your breathing pattern. A pillow under your knees. A block under a chair. You

pick it, you apply it, and you pay attention to it.

In the Active State, the tool does most of the work. In the Restorative State, techniques do all of it. In the Transitional State, you use a little of both.

Most Extreme, Not Most Important

You'll see this book talk about the Power Stance in the gym a lot. That isn't because the gym matters most. It's because the Active State is where the Power Stance works its hardest — its most extreme form. It's the toughest test of the tool, not the most important use of it.

The most important use may be the rest of your day, the long, ordinary hours when nothing feels dangerous at all.

Two Ways to Get Hurt

This is why all three states matter.

In the Active State, damage comes from **force**: one heavy lift done wrong, one bad twist under load. It happens fast, and you usually know right away. Doctors call this kind of injury *acute*.

In the Transitional and Restorative States, damage comes from **time**: a slumped desk chair for eight hours a day, five days a week, for years. A neck twisted on the wrong pillow every night. Nothing about it hurts enough to

feel dangerous in the moment. Then one day, years later, it finally shows up as pain that won't go away — and it gets called "wear and tear," or just getting older. Doctors call this kind of damage *degenerative*.

The heavy lift gets all the attention. The slow, quiet damage is usually what brings people to me.

Balance Never Turns Off

One more thing holds true in all three states: your body always has to find balance against gravity.

In the Active State, that balance comes from the full Power Stance. In the Transitional State, it comes from a lighter version of it. Even

when you’re stretching or sitting, your body still needs to be balanced over its center — not leaning, gripping, or twisting to hold a position it hasn’t really earned. Only in true rest — lying down, or so well supported that something else is holding you — does the job of balancing finally go away.

What changes from one state to the next is how much effort that moment calls for. The need to be balanced never changes.

Putting It Together

- **Active State:** real load. Full Power Stance.
- **Transitional State:** ordinary movement. Light Power

Stance, plus techniques.

- **Restorative State:** true rest. Power Stance off; techniques only.
- **The gateway:** the moment you leave rest. Set a light Power Stance before you move.

Life decides which state you're in. You decide how you respond to it. That's what the rest of this book teaches.

Chapter 7 — Stress Adds Up

One Account

Your nervous system keeps one account for everything that stresses you. It doesn’t keep separate books.

Physical stress goes in: a sore back, a stiff neck, a body slumped in a chair all afternoon.

Mental stress goes in: worry, fear, embarrassment, a deadline, an argument.

Emotional and spiritual stress goes in too: feeling down about yourself, feeling stuck, never feeling at peace.

Each of these has its own layers underneath it. But they all draw from the same account. And the more that piles up, the worse everything works — your body, your mood, your sleep, your balance, your patience.

The Beam

Picture a wooden beam, eight inches wide and ten feet long, lying flat on the floor. Walk across it. No problem at all.

Now put that same beam up on two ladders, five feet in the air. Suddenly your nervous system panics. You tense up. You start to shake. Your knees bend and your hips drop, all on their own, to get your body lower. And your mind

can’t think about anything else. Try holding a normal conversation up there, or running through your grocery list. You can’t. Every bit of your attention goes into staying up.

Nothing about your ability changed. Same beam, same feet. What changed is how safe your nervous system feels — and that fear alone is enough to take away balance you had a moment ago.

The Same Thing, All Day Long

Now scale that down, way down, to an ordinary day.

When your body is poorly organized — slumped at a desk, shoulders forward, head hanging

out in front — your nervous system is a little bit on that beam, all day long. You don't feel afraid. You may even feel comfortable. But your nervous system knows you're off balance, and it's working the whole time to hold you together. It braces. It guards. It keeps a little of its attention on you, every minute.

That's a quiet, steady drain. Tight muscles. Tired shoulders. Less energy. And then something unexpected happens — a patch of ice you didn't see, a step you misjudged — and the body meeting that moment is already tense and already tired. That's what turns an ordinary slip into a real injury.

When Protection Becomes a Loop

Your body has good reasons for everything it does. When something is strained or injured, it protects that area in three ways:

- **Pain** — a warning to stop using that part.
- **Inflammation** — swelling, heat, and soreness that bring in the body's repair crews.
- **Stress hormones** — chemicals like cortisol that put your whole body on alert.

For a short time, that's exactly what you want. It's how you heal.

The trouble starts when the cause never goes away. If your posture

keeps straining the same spot day after day, the alarm never shuts off. Pain keeps you tense. The tension keeps the area irritated. The irritation keeps the inflammation going. And the inflammation keeps the pain going. Each one keeps setting off the next. Over time, those stress hormones stay high, too — and when they stay high for too long, they start breaking down muscle instead of building it. The very system meant to protect you is now wearing you down.

The usual answer is a painkiller or an anti-inflammatory. I use them myself. Accidents happen, and there’s a time and a place for these medicines. If the pain is keeping you from sleep, your job,

or something that truly can't wait, take what your doctor or the label recommends. But a pill quiets the alarm. It doesn't touch whatever set it off. Use it to get through what you must do, not to cover up pain so you can keep doing the very thing that's making it last longer.

The better way around the loop is to stop feeding it. Avoid what you truly can avoid, and let an accident be just an accident, not something you keep dragging out by how you sit, stand, and move. Once you can picture what's happening inside you, you won't want to keep setting off that alarm. Take away the cause, and the alarms finally have a chance to quiet down on their own.

Take Any Layer Off, and Everything Feels Better

Here’s the good news. Because it’s all one account, taking stress off in any one area helps everywhere.

Posture takes off a lot at once. When your body is organized, your joints stop getting ground in the wrong places. Your muscles stop guarding. Your breathing opens up. Your nervous system has less to worry about, so it calms down.

And it isn’t only physical. When you stand organized — upright, balanced, relaxed — people see it. You carry yourself with more confidence, and people respond to that. Knowing your body is

working with you instead of against you is its own kind of relief. You feel better about yourself, and that takes stress off the mental and emotional side too.

Some of It Comes for Free

This is my favorite part.

When you first find your Power Stance and your body starts to settle into a neutral, balanced position, some of your strength, flexibility, and balance come back almost for free. You haven't trained anything new yet. Your nervous system simply stops guarding, and it lets go of what it was holding back. A tight muscle loosens because it no longer has to protect you. Your balance

improves because your body isn't fighting itself. You feel stronger because your muscles are finally lined up to work together.

That's the free version — what your body is willing to hand back the moment you get organized.

Then, when you train on top of that — in the gym, in your stretching, in your everyday life — you build faster and more safely than you ever could from a body that was fighting itself. You're no longer spending effort just to hold yourself together. All of it can go toward getting better.

The science of *how* all this happens inside the muscle is fascinating, and I'll go deeper into it in my next book. For now, you

only need to know this: get organized first, and good things start happening on their own.

Chapter 8 — The Pop Off Valve

A Safety Valve Built Into You

A water heater has a pressure relief valve. When the pressure inside gets too high, the valve pops open and lets some out — before the tank bursts. A turkey has a little pop-up timer that jumps out when it’s done.

Your Power Stance has something like that too. I call it the **pop off valve**.

Here’s how it works. When your Power Stance is assembled and you’re carrying a real load, your core is closed and tight. If the

load becomes more than your body can safely handle, your core lets go on its own. Your ribs lift, your belly opens, and you feel your structure give. You didn't decide to let go. Your nervous system did it for you.

That release is a message: stop.

You Don't Dismiss It. It Dismisses Itself.

This is one of the most useful things about the Power Stance. You don't have to guess when you've had enough. Your Power Stance keeps you in a safe, organized position for as long as you can truly hold it. When you can't, it lets go — and that's your signal to stop what you're doing.

But the valve only exists if the Power Stance was there to begin with. If you never assembled it — if you lifted with your shoulders rolled forward and your core already hanging open — there's nothing to release. No structure, no valve, no warning. That's one of the biggest reasons to learn the Power Stance before you lift anything heavy.

Two Switches

The Power Stance is something you build on purpose. But it's built on two things your nervous system does automatically — two responses you can't control, can't skip, and can't talk your way around.

The first switch turns your core on. It's the one from Chapter 5: the instant you get ready to move, your nervous system closes your deep core muscles to give you a stable base. Science calls this an *anticipatory postural adjustment*. That's where the Power Stance begins.

The second switch turns your core off. When a muscle doing hard work — your chest on a bench press, your legs under a heavy box — gets close to its limit, it sends distress signals to your nervous system. Your nervous system answers by turning down effort across your whole body, and your closed core lets go along with it. Science calls this *central fatigue*. That's where the Power

Stance ends — and that release is what I call the pop off valve.

The science names these two responses. Linking them to the exact moment your Power Stance switches on and the exact moment it lets go is what I've watched happen in real bodies for forty-five years.

So the Power Stance has a built-in beginning and a built-in end, set by your own nervous system. Everything you do under load happens between those two switches.

Can your core muscles get tired on their own, like any other muscle? Of course. Work your abs hard enough and they'll wear out.

But that’s not what the pop off valve is about.

Remember the two kinds of muscle from Chapter 4? Your deep core is built mostly for the long haul, like a posture muscle. The big muscles you train in the gym, like your chest, back, and legs, are work muscles: strong, fast, and quick to tire. That’s why a set in the gym is usually somewhere between six and fifteen reps. It’s also why you’ll see someone do a couple hundred sit-ups, but you’ll never see anyone do two hundred reps on a heavy bench press.

A set only takes a short time. Your core can hold a hard, even extreme, squeeze for that long without wearing out. So when your core lets go at the end of a

heavy set, it usually isn't because your core ran out. It's because the muscle doing the real work reached its limit, and your nervous system started easing back on your effort. Not on everything. It doesn't shut you down like fainting, and the quiet background tone that keeps you upright stays on. What it turns down is the hard, on-purpose effort you're choosing to make. Your core isn't the part that failed. It's the messenger.

And your core is the hardest on-purpose effort in your whole body right then. It has the most to lose, so that's where the drop shows up biggest, and where you'll feel the message most clearly. That's the whole point. The tighter your

core, the easier it is to feel the exact moment it lets go.

And that “something” isn’t always the muscle you’re training, either. A sudden twinge in your neck, a sharp pain in your side, even a sneeze — anything that sends a real distress signal can make your core let go. Every release is worth paying attention to.

Practice a Real Core Contraction

This is why I make such a big deal about learning to close your core properly. We practice it like a skill. Not a half-hearted squeeze — a full, deliberate, strong contraction you can call on anytime.

There are three good reasons for this.

It protects you. A strong, closed core holds your spine steady and keeps your organs packed and supported, like the sealed soda can from Chapter 5.

It protects against blowouts. Heavy effort creates pressure inside your belly. A strong, closed core, paired with the right breathing, helps hold that pressure where it belongs instead of letting it push out through a weak spot — which is how hernias and hemorrhoids can happen. (Chapter 10 covers breathing.)

It makes the signal clear. When your core is truly closed and strong, you'll feel the exact

moment it lets go. A half-hearted contraction gives you a mushy, easy-to-miss signal. A strong one gives you a clean, clear release you can't miss — right when the working muscle hits its limit.

One Signal, Two Meanings

The pop off valve always sends the same signal. What it means depends on what you were doing.

In real life, it means stop. Say you're loading a heavy box onto the tailgate of a truck. Your Power Stance is set, and you get the box up there. The valve never opened. Good — that's exactly what you want. Out in the real world, you never want that valve to go off. You're not training; you're getting

a job done safely. If it does open, set the box down. The box was too heavy for you today.

In a planned set at the gym, it can mean you arrived. Sometimes you deliberately train a set to the point where your muscles truly can't do another rep. If you've set up safely — with the safety bars in place to catch the weight — the valve opening right at that point isn't a warning. It's the finish line you were aiming for.

Same valve. Same signal. The difference is whether you meant to get there.

And if you were aiming for ten reps and the valve opened at six, that's useful too. The weight was

too heavy for the set you planned. Lighten it next time.

Know Your Way Out First

Before you take on any real load — in the gym or anywhere else — know how you'll get out if the valve opens.

In the gym, that means safety bars set low enough to catch the weight, or knowing exactly where you can set the weight down. At home, it means a clear path and a place to put the box. If there's no safe way out when the valve opens, don't take on the task in the first place.

Here's something I've watched for years: when a lifter knows the safety bars will catch the weight,

the core lets go cleanly at the end of the set. Without that safety, the same lifter starts squirming as the weight gets heavy — twisting, planting one foot, letting the bar tip to one side — hunting for any way out. That squirming is a separate panic response. Take the danger away, and it disappears. Good safety setup isn't just about avoiding accidents. It lets you learn what a clean release actually feels like.

Where to Put Your Attention

When a set gets hard, most people focus on the muscle that's burning, like the chest on a bench press. That pulls your attention

straight toward the thing trying to make you quit.

Once you know the exercise, put your attention on your core instead. As the rep slows down and the weight starts to win, squeeze your core down harder and harder. You’re not ignoring the burn. You’re just not handing it your attention. That keeps your whole body level and organized as you get close to your limit, and it makes the moment your core lets go impossible to miss.

The Last Rep Has to Look Like the First

The last rep of a set only counts if it still looks like the exercise you set out to do — and if your Power Stance is still together.

The moment you twist, shrug, arch your back, kick a leg, or let one hand drift higher than the other just to force that last rep up, you're not training the exercise anymore. You're training a compensation, and calling it the same thing.

The one I see most often, and that people notice least in themselves: one hand or one arm rising higher than the other. That's a real shift in your whole structure, not a small detail. When it happens, the set is over.

The goal was never to move the weight at all costs. The goal is to keep your structure together for as long as you honestly can.

The Ping Pong Effect Is Not the Pop Off Valve

Don’t confuse the pop off valve with the Ping Pong Effect from Chapter 4. They can look similar, but they’re opposite events.

- **The Ping Pong Effect** happens while you’re still learning. Your nervous system slips back into the old, wrong pattern — elbows drifting, shoulders rolling forward — even with a light weight.
- **The pop off valve** happens after you’ve learned the Power Stance. Your structure is correct, and your body lets go because the load has truly reached your limit.

One needs to be corrected. The other needs to be respected.

Your Limit Changes Every Day

The weight where your valve opens isn't fixed. It's a reading of your body on that day.

Come in rested and sharp, and your limit is higher. Come in after three nights of bad sleep, a hard week, or an argument with someone you love, and it's lower. Your nervous system takes all of that into account automatically — the same stress account from Chapter 7.

That makes the pop off valve one of the most honest gauges you'll ever have. It's specific to your

body, today, in these conditions. No app or chart can read that for you. Note where it opens. Train to raise it over time. But never override it.

What the Valve Can’t Catch

The pop off valve is built to catch danger that happens now — one moment when a load is too much.

It isn’t built to catch slow damage. A shoulder that drifts a little out of position on every rep, for years, never sets off the valve, because no single rep feels dangerous. Neither does sitting slumped for eight hours a day. That kind of damage builds quietly until one day it hurts.

That’s why the Power Stance matters all day long, not only when you lift something heavy. The valve protects you in the heavy moments. Good posture protects you in all the others.

Chapter 9 — Everyday Moments

Most injuries don’t happen in the gym. They happen carrying groceries, bending for a sock, or getting out of bed. This chapter is about those ordinary moments — the ones nobody thinks to protect.

A Quick Flip or a Dimmer Switch

Your Power Stance won’t always look or feel the same. It changes with the job.

Sometimes it’s a **quick flip** — on for a split second, then off. Think of swinging across monkey bars: your core closes for an instant to

grab the next bar, then lets go just as fast.

Other times it’s a **dimmer switch** — held steady and turned up or down to match the load. Carrying a light bag a few steps into the house takes a little. Lifting something heavy onto the tailgate of a truck takes a lot.

What never changes is the alignment: shoulder blades back and down, core closed, the lean from the hip. What changes is how hard, and for how long, you hold it.

The Grocery Bag Test

Picture someone carrying a grocery bag in each hand, up the sidewalk, up the porch steps, and

through the front door. Most people do it with their shoulders pulled forward, letting the weight drag them into a slump the whole way.

That slump hits three places:

- **Your neck and upper back** strain to hold your head up. Some of those muscles get tight and short; others get stretched too thin. That’s the ache that always seems to want a massage.
- **The front of your shoulder** takes the wear. A small tendon there gets pinched a little every day. You don’t feel it happening. Then one ordinary moment — a tennis swing, lifting a child, putting

a cup away in a high cupboard — finds years of quiet wear all at once, and you're left wondering how something so ordinary could hurt so much.

- **Your lower back** takes every step. Nobody thinks two grocery bags are heavy enough to hurt anything.

But here's proof that it matters: there's a real strength exercise built around carrying weight exactly this way, step after step. It's called the **farmer's walk**, and coaches use it to build serious strength. If it's demanding enough to train with on purpose, it's demanding enough to wear you down when your posture is wrong the whole way.

Carry those same bags in your Power Stance — shoulder blades back and down, core closed — and the walk to your front door becomes good for you instead of quietly working against you.

One-Sided Loads

There’s a cousin of the farmer’s walk called the **suitcase carry**: weight in one hand only. Most people do a version of this every day without knowing it — a heavy purse or bag on the same shoulder, year after year.

The usual advice is to switch sides once in a while. That’s better than nothing, but it misses the point. A one-sided load doesn’t just stress one side. It pulls your whole body

out of balance, with the other side tugging back to make up for it. Switching shoulders only moves the problem. Holding your Power Stance while you carry — staying centered even with an uneven load — protects the whole system.

And here’s the flip side. Done on purpose, with your Power Stance in place, a one-sided load is one of the best things you can do for your body. The weight is trying to pull you over to one side, and your body has to stay tall and centered anyway. That puts the muscles along your sides and deep in your core to work in a way that carrying two even loads never does. Researchers who study the spine have found the same thing: carrying weight in one hand

challenges the side of the trunk more than carrying weight in both.

So for your core and your balance, the suitcase carry is often more valuable than the farmer’s walk. Most training is done two-handed and even on both sides. It should include more one-sided work. The difference is intent. A heavy purse hanging off a slumped shoulder wears you down. The same weight, carried on purpose in a Power Stance, builds you up.

The Sock Story

You’ve heard some version of this. Someone’s back goes out, and you ask what they were doing.

“Nothing! I just bent over to pick up a sock.”

The sock weighs nothing. So what happened?

Here’s what happened. Their hamstrings and the backs of their legs weren’t flexible enough to let them bend safely from the hip all the way to the floor. They didn’t bend their knees, either. So their lower back took up the slack — rounding forward, dropping their chest toward the floor, with their head hanging out in front.

Now think about the weight involved. Your head, arms, and upper body make up roughly two-thirds of your body weight. When you bend over like that, all of it hangs out at the end of a long

lever, with your lower back as the pivot. The sock could have been a feather. What hurt their back was their own body weight, hanging at the worst possible angle.

There's another reason that moment is so dangerous. Near the bottom of a relaxed, full forward bend, the muscles along your lower back can go almost completely quiet. Researchers have measured this. It's called the *flexion-relaxation phenomenon*. Right at the worst point of leverage, the muscles that normally protect your spine hand the load over to the ligaments and discs. In my experience, that combination — the most leverage, with the least muscle protection — is a big part of why an ordinary

reach can put someone on the floor. Here's the part that surprises people. Those muscles go quiet when your lower back reaches the end of its own bend — not at any set angle of your body. If your hamstrings are tight, your hips can't do much of the bending, so your lower back has to do most of it. That means it reaches its end of range, and those muscles switch off, much sooner — at a shallower, more awkward angle, with your upper body hanging out like a lever bar. The less flexible you are, the sooner your spine gets left hanging on its ligaments and discs.

And it's often the moment you come back up, or twist from that hanging position, that the back

finally gives. Here's my own reasoning about why. Hanging at the bottom of that bend, the bones of your lower spine slide slightly forward on each other, and the discs get pushed toward the back. Then you start to rise, and those back muscles switch on hard and pull on a spine that's still shifted out of place. That's when something gets pinched.

There's an opposite problem, too. In many people with a long-lasting sore back, those muscles never switch off at all, even at the bottom of a full bend. The back stays braced and guarded, all the time, trying to protect itself. That's tiring and tight in its own way, and it keeps squeezing the spine. The switch-off isn't the

enemy. In a healthy, organized body, it works the way it was designed. The trouble comes when the body is too stiff, too collapsed, or too sore for the switch to work properly.

Back injuries have many causes, and research is still sorting them out. But this is one worth respecting.

The fix is simple. **Bend your knees.** Set a light Power Stance — shoulder blades back, core closed, a slight lean from the hip — and lower yourself with your legs. That's the same movement you use to get out of a chair and the same one you use to lift something heavy. It's what "lift with your legs, not your back" was always trying to say.

Nobody hurts their back lifting something they respected. They hurt it reaching for a sock, thinking about nothing at all.

Hear Me Well

This is one of the most important things in this chapter, so let me put it plainly.

Your nervous system has a built-in switch for your lower back muscles. It's called the **flexion-relaxation phenomenon**. In a healthy, organized body, when you bend all the way forward, it switches those muscles off at the bottom, the way it was designed to.

When your body isn't organized, that switch goes wrong one of two

ways:

- **It switches off too early.** In a stiff body, your lower back reaches the end of its bend too soon, and the muscles go quiet at a bad angle — leaving your spine hanging like a lever bar on its ligaments and discs.
- **It never switches off.** In a sore, guarded back, those muscles stay clenched all the time. They're posture muscles, built for light, steady work all day — not for being squeezed hard every minute. Held tight nonstop, at the wrong length, they tire out, get weaker, and ache. That constant soreness sends even more distress signals into the

same stress account from Chapter 7. And a back held tight on one side starts pulling the rest of your body out of balance, one domino at a time.

You don’t need to remember any of that. Here’s all you need to know: when your body is organized in a neutral Power Stance, the switch works the way it was designed, and those muscles get to do their real job — nothing more, nothing less.

Getting Up: Bed, Floor, and Couch

There’s a second kind of everyday damage, and it’s just as slow and

quiet as the slump. It happens when you get up.

Think about how most people get out of bed, up off the floor, or out of a deep, soft couch. They heave themselves forward and up, rounding their back to launch out of it. That throws a big load into the discs and joints of the spine in a short, sharp burst. It happens several times a day, every day, for years.

This kind of damage rarely makes your back “go out” in the moment. The muscles are working the whole way up, so the spine isn’t caught off guard the way it is in a relaxed bend. But the wear still adds up, one heave at a time.

The fix is the same every time: **stop, organize, then move.**

- **Getting out of bed:** set a light Power Stance, roll onto your side, and push yourself up from there. Don’t sit straight up off your back.
- **Getting up off the floor:** roll to one side first, which naturally brings your Power Stance into play, and rise from there. Skip the long, straining crunch.
- **Getting out of a deep couch:** scoot to the front edge first. Set your stance. Then stand up from the edge instead of fighting your way out of the middle.

Each one takes about two extra seconds. Those two seconds protect your back every day for the rest of your life.

Every Lift, Every Carry, Every Reach

Once you start noticing, you'll find more moments in your day that call for your Power Stance than you ever imagined. Lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, reaching, getting up — every one of them uses it to some degree.

You're not expected to think about all of them on day one. Nobody does. The goal is practice until it becomes automatic — until your body sets the right amount of Power Stance for each moment on its own, the way it already braces

your core before you reach for a mug. That’s what mastery looks like. And every grocery bag, every sock, and every morning out of bed is a chance to practice it.

Chapter 10 — Sitting, Screens, and Sleep

Think about where your hours actually go: sitting, looking at a screen, and sleeping. That’s where most of your day goes — and where most of the slow damage happens. This chapter is about those long hours.

No Wrong Position — Just Too Long in One

First, some good news. Within reason, there’s no wrong position to rest in. Slouching back on the couch, leaning on one elbow, curling up in a chair — none of these will hurt you for a few minutes. Your body was built to

move through all kinds of positions.

The problem is staying in one position for hours, day after day, year after year. That’s when muscles set themselves too short or too long, joints get worn in one spot, and your nervous system learns the slump as “normal.” So the goal isn’t to sit perfectly. It’s to sit well most of the time, and to move often.

Why Chairs Fold You Up

Almost every chair you sit in — at your desk, in your car, at the kitchen table, even on most gym machines — bends your hips to about ninety degrees. Your thighs

point straight out, and your hips close up tight.

That ninety-degree bend pulls your pelvis backward, flattens the curve of your lower back, and rolls your whole upper body forward into a slump. Your shoulders round, and your head drifts out in front. Once you're folded up like that, your Power Stance isn't even available. It's not that you're doing it wrong. The chair won't let you do it right.

Sitting feels like the restful choice, and standing feels like work. For your structure, it's often the other way around. Your hips, your spine, and your natural resting muscle lengths were built for standing and moving — not for folding into a right angle all day.

The 120-Degree Rule

The fix is simple: sit a little higher.

Raise your seat so your hips sit higher than your knees, opening the angle between your thighs and your body from ninety degrees toward about **one hundred twenty degrees**. You can do it with a firm cushion, a folded blanket, or best of all, a triangle-shaped wedge cushion that tips you slightly forward. That little forward tilt starts your dipping-bird lean for you and keeps you from sliding back into the chair.

With your hips opened up, your pelvis can settle toward neutral, your lower back keeps its natural curve, and your shoulder blades

and core can do their jobs. This works at a desk, in the car, at the table, and on gym equipment. It's one of the simplest changes in this whole book, and one of the most powerful.

I've seen this make a real difference even for people who can only exercise sitting down. A seated class done in a regular chair teaches every movement from that folded-up position. Put a single yoga block or cushion under the person so their hips open up, and the same class starts building good habits instead of bad ones.

What a Horse Taught Me About Chairs

I've been riding horses and ponies since I was eight, bareback and with a saddle. After my back injury, I started paying close attention to how I sat on a horse, and I noticed something. A horse's back fixes exactly what a chair gets wrong.

A chair folds your hips to ninety degrees, with your thighs straight out in front and closed up tight. A horse's body spreads your legs around a curve and opens the hip instead. Your knees hang down instead of jamming forward, and your weight settles through your seat and down into your heels, just where it goes in your Power Stance.

Sitting on a horse is never completely passive. Your posture

muscles are quietly working the whole time to keep you balanced. But those are exactly the muscles built for that job, so it costs almost nothing. That's the difference between the right kind of sitting and the wrong kind: one quietly uses the right muscles, and the other slowly wears out the wrong ones.

Tech Neck — Both Ways

Everyone has heard of "tech neck" — your head drooping forward to look down at your phone. That's real, and it happens constantly.

But desks often cause the same problem in reverse, and most people never notice. Picture

someone who sets up their computer screen high and sits up very straight, with a hard arch in their lower back, because they think that's good posture. For a while, the screen matches. But nobody can hold a forced arch all day. Slowly, they slump. The screen doesn't move — so now their head has to crane upward to see a screen that used to be at eye level.

Either way, your neck is doing a rescue job. Your inner ear — your body's built-in level — always wants to keep your eyes level with the world. When your spine collapses underneath, your neck bends and strains to drag your head back to where your inner ear wants it. The neck isn't the

problem. It’s the one cleaning up after the problem.

The fix starts lower down, not at your neck. Sit higher, set your shoulder blades back and down, close your core, and your head settles on top of your spine where it belongs. Then adjust the screen to meet your organized body — not the other way around.

Move Often

Even perfect sitting is still sitting. Get up at least once an hour. Stand, walk to the kitchen, drop into a deep squat for a few seconds if you can, reach your arms overhead. Every time you stand up, cross the gateway the right way: organize first, then

move. Those small breaks keep your joints moving, your tissues from setting in one position, and your nervous system from learning the slump as home.

Breathing

Breathing and posture are tied together more tightly than most people realize.

Your posture can squeeze your breathing from every direction. When your shoulders round forward, the muscles across the front of your chest shorten and pull the front of your rib cage closed. When your lower back arches too much, the ribs flare up in front and the back of your rib cage can’t expand properly either.

When you lean to one side — standing on one hip, carrying a bag on the same shoulder every day, slumping sideways in a chair — the ribs on that side get squeezed together while the other side gets stretched. And when your body twists to make up for all of this, the rib cage gets wrung out like a towel. Every one of these takes room away from your lungs. Fixing only one just moves the squeeze somewhere else.

When your Power Stance brings your spine back to neutral — shoulder blades back and down from the top, the core and hip organized from below — your rib cage can finally open in every direction: front, back, and sides. Most of my clients notice they can

breathe more deeply as their posture improves. They didn't learn a new breathing trick. The cage around their lungs simply opened up.

"But pulling your shoulders back makes it harder to breathe." You may hear this, or read it somewhere. Take it with a grain of salt. It's true of the way most people do it. They yank their shoulders back, lift their ribs, and arch their lower back, like the person sitting up straight the wrong way in Chapter 2. That pinches the back of the rib cage closed, and of course breathing gets harder.

That isn't the Power Stance. Your shoulder blades go back and down, but your core keeps your

ribs down and your spine neutral at the same time. And the Power Stance isn't one extreme spot. It lives in a range, the middle zone from Chapter 3. Find that zone, and your rib cage has room to open in every direction. When you understand the details, pulling your shoulder blades back doesn't choke your breathing. Doing it the wrong way does.

This is one more reason the Power Stance isn't the "sit up straight" posture you were taught. Remember what happens when I tell people what I do: they all sit up straight, and they all do it wrong. That faked version is where a lot of bad breathing starts. From across the room, an untrained eye can't tell real

posture from faked posture. The difference is all in the details. And now you know them.

How you breathe also depends on which of the three states you're in:

- **At rest (the Restorative State):** breathe low and slow, letting your belly rise and fall freely. Your core is relaxed, your pelvic floor is relaxed, and your ribs expand easily. This is how your body calms down and recovers.
- **In ordinary movement (the Transitional State):** keep breathing normally and easily while your Power Stance works lightly in the background. Never hold your

breath just to stand up or walk across a room.

- **Under a real load (the Active State):** take a breath and brace your closed core around it for the hardest part of the effort — the lift, the push, the heave onto the tailgate. Then breathe again as soon as that hardest moment passes. That brief brace helps keep the pressure inside your belly working for you, supporting your spine, instead of pushing out through a weak spot.

That last one matters. Heavy effort creates real pressure inside your torso. A strong, closed core with a well-timed breath holds that pressure where it belongs.

Straining with an open, loose belly — or holding your breath too long — is how people end up with hernias, hemorrhoids, or feeling light-headed. Brace for the hard part, then let the breath go. And if you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, talk to your doctor before doing any heavy straining at all.

The Last Decisions Before Sleep

You'll spend roughly a third of your life asleep. Once you're asleep, you have no more control over your body than over anyone else's. So the only decisions that matter are the ones you make before you drift off.

A few simple ones make a big difference:

- **If you sleep on your side,** put a pillow between your knees. It keeps your top leg from dragging your pelvis and lower back into a twist for the next seven or eight hours.
- **If you sleep on your back,** put a pillow under your knees. It lets your lower back relax out of an exaggerated arch.
- **If you're nursing an injured shoulder or hip,** prop it into a comfortable, neutral position before you fall asleep, so it isn't crushed or twisted all night.
- **A pillow for your head should fill the gap, not tilt**

you. Your head should stay roughly in line with your spine, not cranked up or hanging down.

The zero-gravity position people reach for when their back hurts — hips and knees bent, legs raised, back supported — is really the 120-degree rule found by accident.

I've noticed something over the years: clients who practice good posture during the day report fewer mornings waking up with a kinked neck or a crushed shoulder. They aren't correcting themselves in their sleep; nobody can do that. My best guess is that a body that goes to bed organized, instead of already sore and aggravated, has less reason to

twist itself into some awkward position in the middle of the night. Your nervous system doesn’t fully clock out just because you did.

Chapter 11 — Injury and Recovery

Most people don’t find me until after they’re hurt. So this chapter is for you if something is already injured, aching, or healing — and you want to get better without setting yourself back.

Your Care Team Fixes It. You Keep It Fixed.

Start with this: if you’re injured, get it looked at. Your doctor, your chiropractor, your physical therapist — they’re trained to find out what’s wrong and fix it, and they’re good at it.

What they usually don’t have is time to teach you how to live in

your body afterward, every hour you're not in their office. That's where this book comes in. When you understand what caused the problem, their work has somewhere to land. You hold the adjustment instead of losing it the next time you sit at a desk or bend for a sock.

That's the real goal: a working partnership, not a one-time fix. They treat you. You carry the correction home. It's good for you, and it's good for them — a patient who holds their progress is the best referral a practitioner can ask for.

Rest Isn't the Whole Answer

When I broke my back, I was told what most injured people are told: stop moving and rest. I understand the caution. But in my experience, complete rest isn't the whole answer.

Your body needs some movement to heal well. Gentle, controlled, correct movement keeps blood flowing to the area, keeps your tissues from stiffening and sticking together, keeps your joints moving through their range, and keeps your nervous system connected to the right patterns. Tissue that heals with no movement at all can heal short and stiff, creating a new problem on top of the old one.

The real choice isn't movement versus no movement. It's

controlled, correct movement versus careless, incorrect movement. And that's a gap nobody fills for most people. You get a few weeks of physical therapy, the visits run out or insurance stops paying, and then you're on your own — without anyone having taught you how to move safely for the rest of your life. That's what the Power Stance is for.

Injury Changes the Rules

Everything in this book so far applies to a healthy body. When you're injured, the rules tighten.

Say you've hurt your rotator cuff. Suddenly, even simple things aren't simple. You can't reach

sideways for a cup of tea with that arm. You can’t roll onto it in your sleep. You can’t use it to push yourself up out of bed. Every movement that involves that shoulder now has to be done with deliberate control: shoulder blade set back and down, the arm kept close to your body, no long reach pulling on the healing tissue. You find another way to get where you’re going — one that doesn’t ask that arm to carry any load.

Connective tissue — tendons, ligaments — heals slowly, because it has a limited blood supply. And every time you irritate it again, you don’t just delay the healing. You can set it back to the beginning.

It also heals slowest when the joint isn't sitting in neutral. Tissue that's held too stretched or too squeezed never gets to relax at its natural length, and it takes longer to mend. Neutral isn't only how you prevent an injury. It's where healing happens fastest.

And don't hide the pain under medicine so you can keep going. It doesn't matter whether it's golf, tennis, martial arts, your garden, or your gym session. Just because an activity is good for you doesn't mean it's good for an injury. The excuse I hear most is, "I couldn't miss a day at the gym, I'd get out of shape." A few weeks off won't undo years of work. Training through an injury can.

So even when an injury feels mild, guard it as if it were still fresh. Genuine rest doesn't require the Power Stance. But the moment that injured part of your body comes into play in any way — reaching, lifting, getting up — it comes into play through your Power Stance. Protected. Never bypassed.

The Coffee Cup

I hear this from clients all the time: "You told me to rest it, and I did, and it felt so much better. Then I reached into the cupboard for a coffee cup — and hurt it all over again."

And while they're telling me, they act it out without realizing it —

reaching up and back, the arm drifting into the exact same angle that hurt them in the first place. Right in front of me, mid-sentence, they repeat the very motion that put them on the floor.

If it hurt you then, it will hurt you now. Nothing about your body changed just because the pain went quiet. It doesn't even take a full reach. A halfway reach, elbow still bent, still puts real leverage on an injured shoulder.

That's why an injured body part needs more than physical caution. It needs a mental rehearsal. Before your body falls back on the old, automatic motion, picture the safe version: the reach that stops short, the arm that stays close, the step onto a stool instead of the

stretch. Practice that picture on purpose until the safe motion is the one your brain reaches for first.

Feeling better is not the same as being healed. “Mild” is exactly the trap, because mild is when people stop paying attention. Whether the pain is sharp or faint, give it more time than you think it needs.

Burn Versus Pain

Not all discomfort means the same thing, and it’s worth learning the difference.

The burn is the honest feeling of a muscle working hard in good form — the warmth and fatigue of

real effort. Working to that edge is legitimate training.

Pain is different. A pinch, a sharp twinge, a nagging ache in a joint, pain that shows up because your form broke down — that's your nervous system telling you something is wrong. That's not the kind of pain you "work through."

"No pain, no gain" gets this backwards. Push through the burn if you choose. Stop for pain — every time, the moment you notice it — and fix your position before you go on.

The Healing Zone

The Power Stance doesn't just protect an injury. It can help it

heal.

When your Power Stance is assembled, your whole body settles into balanced tension. The injured tissue is held in a neutral position — not squeezed, not overstretched — cradled by everything around it. That neutral position is where connective tissue heals best.

So during recovery, brief Power Stance squeezes can help. Lying down or standing, gently set your Power Stance, hold a firm contraction for a moment, and release. Physical therapists already use this kind of hold-without-moving exercise, called an *isometric*, to keep a muscle strong without straining an injury. The Power Stance is a whole-body

version: one brief squeeze keeps strength throughout your body, keeps everything in balance, and cradles the injured area in its healing position.

These are brief squeezes, not all-day holding. Between them, rest fully, or move gently the way your practitioner allows.

When Something Is Already Worn

Many people come to me after an X-ray or MRI has already found wear in a joint — worn cartilage, or a bone spur.

Here’s how that happens. When a joint sits out of line for years, the load lands on the same small spot over and over, the way a tire out

of alignment wears bald on one edge. Cartilage wears thin there. When bone starts to rub on bone, the body builds up extra bone at that spot — a bone spur. That spur can press on the tissue around it, and that's often where the pain comes from.

Keep grinding on that spot with bad posture, and it keeps getting irritated — more painful, and often worse over time. Change your posture so the worn surfaces stop rubbing in the same place, and you stop feeding it.

I'll be careful here, because this matters. Bone spurs usually don't disappear, and cartilage that's gone doesn't grow back. But you can often stop the irritation that makes them hurt and keeps them

growing. Think about calluses on your hands from hard work: stop the friction, and they fade. A bunion won't straighten itself out, but the swelling around it can calm down once the pressure stops. Your body isn't trying to hurt itself. It's responding to what you keep doing to it. Change what you do, and its response changes too.

I've seen serious lifters who were told their shoulder was "wrecked" get back under the bar. The damage didn't reverse. We moved their working range off the damaged part of the joint, so the lift stopped asking that worn spot to do a job it could no longer handle. Same shoulder, same old

damage, a completely different result.

I’m not a doctor, and this isn’t a promise about your case. Talk to your physician about your options. But it’s worth knowing that fixing the alignment is a real option to explore — before surgery, and after it, so the same problem doesn’t simply build up again.

Pain Can Be a Teacher

One last thing. My own injury taught me everything in this book, because it told me — instantly — when I was doing something right and when I wasn’t.

Some of my clients have that same built-in teacher. A worn shoulder that sends a sharp signal

the moment they drift out of posture is uncomfortable, but it teaches fast. Once the pain settles down, many people finally feel the difference between a position that helps and one that hurts. That feedback is a gift. Learn from it, and don’t wait for the pain to come back before you listen.

Chapter 12 — Stretching That Actually Works

The Young Woman on the Floor

A young woman came to me because of aches and pains she was getting while training in the gym. She wanted help with her technique. But as we talked, she mentioned that she also did yoga regularly, and had for a long time.

So I asked her to show me a pose that bothered her. She sat down for the seated hamstring stretch, legs straight out in front, reached forward, grabbed her legs, and pulled herself down. Her back

rounded far past where it should. And as she pulled, her chin tucked hard into her chest, rounding her neck right along with her back. She couldn't get as deep into the stretch as she wanted, so she was forcing it, and her neck was paying the price.

She told me she had never liked that pose. But it was part of the class, so she pushed through the discomfort every time. She didn't even know if it was coming from a muscle, a tendon, or a ligament.

Once I knew what to look for, I saw it everywhere. She did the same thing in almost every stretch. And she'd brought it into the gym: on the machines and with free weights, her shoulders rounded forward, her back curled,

and her chin dropped toward her chest. The aches she came to me about weren't really coming from the gym. They were coming from a habit she'd built on the yoga mat, pulling herself into stretches she wasn't ready for.

We backed her out of that pose and propped her into it properly, so her body could rest there without gripping or pulling. The pain went away. So did the rest of it. The gym aches cleared up. So did the nagging pain she'd gotten used to sitting at her desk, standing too long, or driving. Even her sleep got better, because her neck was no longer aching through the night.

Here's why it reached so far. Her neck had never been allowed to

find neutral. The muscles were either stretched too long or squeezed too short, and either way, they ache the same way. Yoga pulled her out of neutral. The gym did it again. And her everyday posture kept her there the rest of the day. There was never a break.

That’s the whole book in one story. Find your Power Stance, find neutral, and bring it to whatever you’re doing: training, working, even resting. Do that, and one bad habit can’t knock down everything else like a row of dominoes.

Her instructor wasn’t a bad teacher. Most people who teach classes love what they do. But a big class moves at one pace, and nobody has time to stop and check

each person’s position. The details are where it goes wrong.

What a Stretch Really Is

Say the word “stretch,” and most people picture a rubber band getting pulled thinner. That isn’t what happens inside a muscle.

Picture a long train of boxcars, hooked end to end. Each boxcar can slide open a little longer or close a little shorter, like a telescope. When you stretch, you’re asking each boxcar to slide open a bit further than it usually does.

When your body decides a muscle truly needs to be longer, it doesn’t make the boxcars stretchier. Over

time, it can add more boxcars to the train.

But most of what you feel when you sink deeper into a stretch isn’t the boxcars at all. It’s your nervous system loosening its grip. Remember guarding from Chapter 2? A guarding body won’t let a tight muscle lengthen. Stretching is really about teaching your nervous system to let go.

Why Years of Stretching Can Get You Nowhere

Here’s the rule that changes everything: **you can’t relax into a position you have to fight to hold.**

If you’re gripping, pulling, or holding yourself up to stay in a

stretch, your nervous system reads that as danger. It guards. And a guarded muscle won't lengthen, no matter how many years you spend there.

That's the whole problem with a flat floor. Not everyone in a room has the same range of motion, and the floor doesn't care. Someone without the flexibility to fold forward ends up hanging out in space, straining to keep from falling out of the pose. They feel a mild pull, so they put up with it and think it's progress. It isn't. It's their body working, not letting go.

This book isn't after maximum range of motion. It's after **organized** range of motion: range your body has earned the right to

use safely, not range you forced your way into.

The Let-Go Test

Here’s how to tell if a stretch is balanced or if you’re faking it. It works standing, sitting, or mid-stretch.

First, look for helpers. Is anything that has nothing to do with the stretch gripping to hold you there? A shoulder creeping up toward your ear. A clenched jaw. Held breath. One hand pressing down harder than the other. Those are your body borrowing help from somewhere else, because the position isn’t truly balanced.

Then the real test: **let go of the effort, all at once.** Does the

position hold for a moment on its own? Or does it collapse right away?

A balanced position holds itself. A faked one only lasts as long as you keep fighting for it. That's your answer.

Backing Into a Stretch

Most people make one of two mistakes when they stretch, and a lot of people make both.

Mistake one: letting gravity take you there. They start upright, sitting or standing. Nothing hurts yet, so they feel confident. They keep everything stiff above and below the joint they want to stretch, and let themselves drop, like a

drawbridge coming down. Gravity decides where they stop, and it leaves them hanging out at a bad angle, held up by nothing but their tight muscles.

Mistake two: forcing it further. Once they stop short, they grab their legs and pull themselves deeper, because everyone else in the class looks further down. It may look like a full stretch. It isn't. A muscle that's being forced is guarding, and a guarding muscle won't lengthen. You can do that for years and never gain an inch.

Come at it from the other direction, in three steps.

1. Find your limit. Start low and compact, folded up close to your

center. For a hamstring stretch, bend your knees until your chest rests near your legs. Now open up slowly, like a flower bud blooming. Your own muscles are doing the work the whole way, so gravity never takes over. When your body says “that’s enough,” you’ve found your limit for today.

2. Set yourself up. That first trip wasn’t the stretch yet. It was a check. While you’re holding yourself open with your own effort, your body can’t truly let go. Now that you know where your limit is, set yourself up so you can arrive there supported: something that holds you, so you don’t have to hold yourself.

3. Let go, and don’t force. Settle into that spot and stop

working. Your balance line gently draws you into the stretch, so you don’t have to hold yourself there. And even when you’re set up right, if you reach the end and realize you’re not flexible enough to go further, don’t pull. That’s the second mistake again, just from a better starting point.

One more thing for standing stretches: bend your knees. Folding forward from a standing position with straight legs hangs your whole upper body out in front of you, the same leverage that hurt the person reaching for a sock back in Chapter 9. Knees bent, back long, the whole way down. That works for everybody.

The Slant Board

Step 2 is where most people have nothing to help them. That's why I built a slant board.

It came out of my own recovery after I broke my back. I'd lost a lot of flexibility, and I was searching for positions I could actually relax in. It isn't the little wedge sold for stretching your calves. Mine is big enough for your whole body, padded, and it tilts from flat up to more than a foot high on one side.

Here's what it fixes. Sit someone with tight hips flat on the floor, legs straight out, and ask them to sit tall. Some fall backward. Some prop an arm behind them. And most reach forward, grab their legs, and pull, just like the young woman did.

Tilt the board so the hips sit higher than the feet, and everything changes. Gravity stops pulling you backward. It gently pulls you forward instead, in the same direction as the stretch. You stop fighting to hold the position and let gravity help you find it.

A yoga block only does half of that job. It raises your hips, but your feet stay on the floor, so there's a step between them, and your knee has to take the twist. On a smooth slope, every joint lines up with the next. Nothing has to twist, and your nervous system feels safe enough to let go.

As you get more flexible, you lower the angle, a little at a time, never rushed. Sitting flat on the floor someday is a fine goal if you

get there. It doesn't have to be everyone's.

There's no perfect home substitute, but there are a few things that work if you understand what you're after: being held up in a neutral position so you don't have to hold yourself.

A grassy slope. A gentle hill in your yard does the same job as the board. Sit facing downhill, hips higher than your feet, and let the slope help you. There's a shallow, bowl-shaped dip in the middle of my own lawn, and sitting in it works just like the board.

Real, solid supports. For some stretches, you can prop yourself into a good position with sturdy

boxes or a rack and bars, something that won't shift or tip under you. A soft pillow or a yoga block on each side won't do it. They sink, slide, and leave gaps. The support has to truly hold you.

Whatever you use, the test is the same: can you let go and stay there? If you're still gripping to hold the position, keep adjusting.

Until you find a setup that works, you can still do a lot. Back into every stretch. Keep your knees bent and don't force depth you don't have. Use the let-go test to catch yourself gripping. And rest in the potty squat, coming up in the next chapter. If you'd like to try the board itself, it's in my studio, and you're welcome to

come feel the difference for yourself.

Bone, or Just the Wrong Angle?

Sometimes a stretch hits a hard stop, and people decide it must be bone hitting bone, a limit they'll never pass. Sometimes that's true. Everyone's joints are built a little differently, and only an X-ray or scan can tell you for sure.

But far more often, the stop isn't the bone. It's the angle you're coming in at. Change your position, and a limit that felt permanent can open up. Before you decide you've hit a wall, check your position first.

Relax, Squeeze, Relax

Once you’re set up and settled, here’s the one piece of technique I’ll hand you plainly.

Most people treat a stretch like a light switch. Either they’re gritting their teeth and muscling deeper, or they’re just hanging there, waiting for it to be over. Neither one alone gets you anywhere.

Do both, taking turns. First, get comfortable and let go. Breathe slow and low into your belly, and let the muscle soften on its own. Then, once you feel it release, give it a gentle squeeze right there at your new edge. Not fighting the stretch, just quietly waking the muscle up. Then let go

again, breathe, and sink into the little bit of room that squeeze just earned you.

Why does that work? A muscle held at a new length with nothing asked of it has no reason to change. A muscle that’s asked to work at that new length, then allowed to rest, then asked again, gets a clear message: this length is safe, and it’s useful. Keep it.

Think of It as a Dial

A good stretch moves back and forth between two of the states you already know. When you gently squeeze, you’re in the Transitional State: a little effort, on purpose. When you let go and

breathe, you move toward the Restorative State.

Picture a dial with the Restorative State at one end and the Transitional State at the other. Lying in bed, drifting off, you're all the way at restorative. A stretch can get close to that, if your setup is good enough that you're barely holding yourself at all.

But you won't always want the dial there. Your goal sets it. On a soft day, when you're after the deep, quiet letting go a yogi finds, you turn it almost all the way to restorative. On a harder day, when you're using the squeeze to ask your body for new length, you turn it back toward transitional. Maybe mostly effort, only a little

rest. You're still balanced, still upright, still in control. You're just asking for something different.

Neither setting is better. They teach your body different things. Knowing which one you're after, and setting yourself up for it, is part of the skill.

The Give and Take

Rest has depths. The better your setup, the deeper you can go. Get yourself positioned well enough, with props and supports holding you, and you can let go of your body completely without tipping over. You can breathe deeper, relax deeper, and settle so far in that you could nearly fall asleep, all while you're in a stretch.

That’s the goal, and it’s a tightrope. Enough stretch to do some good, but not so much that it wakes your body back up to guard. Think of the master yogis sitting in the lotus pose. They aren’t fighting it. They’re enjoying it, and it carries them off into real stillness. They earned that with years of flexibility. A good setup lets you start working toward it now.

That back-and-forth is what tells your body the new length is safe to keep. It’s also why stretching, relaxing, and meditating sit so close together. Each one is really the same skill: learning to switch your nervous system on and off, on purpose, and how much tension to put on yourself, with

care. That’s what makes you stronger and more flexible. Forcing never will.

Notice what just happened in this chapter. To get more flexible, you used balance to set yourself up, and a little strength, the gentle squeeze, to ask for new length. That’s what this book meant back at the start: strength, flexibility, and balance aren’t three separate things. They grow from the same roots, and they borrow from each other all the time.

And it’s never only your body. A stretch you’re fighting is also a mind that’s tense. A stretch you’ve settled into is a mind that’s calm. Bring a calm, patient mind to your body, and your body pays you back with a calmer, happier

mind. That’s why you don’t force things. Forcing breaks the whole circle.

How long to hold, how hard to squeeze, and how to time it with your breath are things I teach in person, because they depend on your body. But now you know what you’re working toward.

Chapter 13 — The Potty Squat and the Lotus

Two Ends of the Same Line

Picture a line. At one end is your Power Stance: everything gathered in and closed. Shoulder blades back and down, core tight, your whole body pulled into one strong, organized unit, ready for work.

At the other end is the lotus pose, the cross-legged seat you've seen in pictures of people meditating. Everything there is released instead of gathered. The body is locked into stillness by how the

bones stack, not by muscles holding it.

Everything your body does lives somewhere on that line. Standing at rest sits near the Power Stance end. The potty squat sits near the lotus end. And off the line entirely is sleep, lying flat, where gravity finally stops asking you to balance at all.

There isn’t one right shape. There’s the right relationship to gravity for whatever you’re doing right now. This chapter is about the far end of the line, the resting end, and why it matters as much as the working end.

The Potty Squat

The potty squat is the deep squat you've seen toddlers drop into to pick up a toy: heels down, knees forward, bottom close to the ground, back rounded, arms relaxed in front. In much of the world, adults still sit this way to rest, talk, cook, or work with their hands.

The surprising part: the potty squat does almost everything you've been told to avoid. Knees travel past the toes. The back rounds. The shoulders round forward.

So is it wrong? No. Those things cause damage when they happen under a heavy load, without you choosing them, over and over, for years. That's the everyday slump this book keeps pointing to. The

potty squat is different. You drop into it on purpose, with no load fighting you, as a place to rest. The same shape that hurts you under a heavy box helps you when you settle into it freely.

In fact, that’s its whole value. Your Power Stance closes and gathers you. The potty squat opens you back up in the opposite direction. It gives tight spots and tissue somewhere to let go that your Power Stance was never meant to reach. Learn both, and nothing in your body stays locked in one extreme for good.

Want That Back Stretch? Get It Here.

People love to show me they can stand up, fold forward, and put

their hands flat on the floor or grab their ankles. It feels great in the back, and I understand why they like it.

But look at what's really happening. If your hamstrings aren't flexible enough to let you fold from the hip, your lower back rounds to make up the difference. That rounding is where the good feeling comes from. So the stretch you're enjoying is actually a sign you're not flexible enough to do the stretch you think you're doing. And to get there, you swing down through ranges you can't control, and gravity or your own muscles pull you further. That's the same danger as the sock story in Chapter 9.

You don’t have to give up that feeling. You can get the same rounding and the same stretch through your spine by resting in a full potty squat. There, it comes safely, with no long lever hanging your upper body out in front of you, plus all the other benefits of the squat. Same delight in your back. You’re just getting there the right way.

Not the Version You’ve Seen in the Gym

You may have seen a trainer teach a deep squat while making you keep your lower back arched the whole way down. That’s a different position, even though it looks the same from across the room.

The arched version is trying to keep your spine from rounding. But while everyone's busy watching the lower back, nobody's looking at the shoulders. They stay rounded forward, exactly where they already were. One end of the body gets fixed and the other gets left behind.

The potty squat in this book lets it all go together: spine rounded, shoulders rounded, knees forward, everything open. It's a resting position, not a lifting one.

It Needs Its Own Balance

Because the potty squat is so relaxed, people assume it doesn't need any organization at all. It

does. It just needs a different kind.

To truly rest at the bottom, your ankles, knees, hips, lower back, neck, and shoulders all have to give a little, at the same time, in the same direction. If one link in that chain is tight, like a stiff ankle, tight thighs, or a lower back that won't round, it pulls the whole position out of balance. You end up bracing somewhere to keep from tipping over. And the moment you're bracing, you're not resting. You're working.

That's why so many of my clients can't get anywhere near this position at first, and why, when they get partway there, it doesn't feel like rest at all.

Getting There Safely

Find out what's stopping you first. It isn't always the same thing. For some people it's tight muscles on the front of the thigh. For others it's the ankle, which won't let the shin move forward over the foot. For others it's the hip, or a lower back that won't round. Figure out which one is holding you back, on your own or with someone who knows what to look for, and work on that piece.

Watch out for the halfway point. The knee is the part at risk here. The worst spot is getting stuck partway down, with your thighs level with the floor. At that angle, if your whole body weight settles onto your knees, they carry a load they were never built to

hold. So don’t drop down and hope. Hold onto something sturdy, like a doorframe, a heavy table, or a railing, and let your arms take some of your weight while you lower yourself slowly. Go a little further each time.

Go slow, and watch your position. Unlike the hamstring stretch in Chapter 12, you don’t have to back into the potty squat, because your bent knees keep your body compact and close to your center. But the same rule applies: move slowly, and pay attention to where your weight is, so you can stop before you end up somewhere you didn’t mean to go.

If you’ve had a hip or knee replaced, or you’re dealing with a hip or knee injury, check with

your doctor before you work toward a deep squat. Some joints have limits on how far they should bend.

The Real Thing, Not a Rehearsal

One more rule, and I mean it the same way I mean it about your Power Stance: the benefit comes from the real position, not an approximation of it.

A potty squat you have to force, brace, or hang onto isn't resting you yet. That's fine while you're working toward it. It's practice, and practice is how you get there. Just know what you're building toward. The real potty squat is one you drop into the way water settles into a low spot: smooth,

easy, no fight. Anything short of that is the road, not the destination.

The potty squat isn’t an advanced trick. It’s one of the most basic resting positions the human body has. If you can’t do it, that isn’t a sign that something’s wrong with you. It’s a measure of how far chairs and modern life have pulled all of us away from what our bodies were built to do.

The Lotus

The lotus is the far end of the line: legs crossed, each foot resting on the opposite thigh, spine tall.

I didn’t come to the lotus through yoga. I came to it by studying how the body holds itself up. Seen that

way, the lotus is something very specific: the most locked-in, self-supporting way a person can sit upright. The crossed legs and wide base form something like a low pyramid. Done right, it holds itself up without the muscles doing any work.

That “done right” is the whole point. The lotus only works if it’s locked in without force. If your muscles are gripping, your hips are straining, or your back is bracing to keep you from tipping, your nervous system is still on duty. You’re holding the shape of meditation while your body is still working underneath it.

That’s why the traditional practitioners trained for years, often from childhood, before they

sat in the lotus for long meditation. It was never about flexibility for its own sake. It was about building a body that could hold that one shape with no strain at all, so the mind could let go completely.

Why Upright, and Not Lying Down?

You might wonder why they didn’t just meditate lying down. When you lie down, your body starts drifting toward sleep. Sitting upright keeps you awake. But an ordinary chair or a loose cross-legged seat still asks some part of you to keep balancing, and in deep meditation you can’t spare any attention for that.

The lotus solves both problems. It keeps you upright and awake, but it holds itself, so your attention can leave your body entirely.

You Don’t Need to Sit in the Lotus

Most modern adults will never sit comfortably in a full lotus, and you don’t need to. I’m not asking you to try. Forcing your knees into that position can hurt them.

The lotus matters in this book as a picture of the goal. It shows what total organization with zero effort looks like. The potty squat is a closer, more reachable version of the same idea: get low, get close to your center, and let your structure hold itself. And the setups in Chapter 12, with props

and a slant board, are how the rest of us borrow a little of what the lotus gives, without years of childhood training.

One end of the line is your Power Stance, gathered and ready to work. The other end is the lotus, released and still. A healthy body knows how to live at both ends and everywhere in between.

Chapter 14 — Balance and Falling

“My Balance Got Bad Because I Got Weak”

I have clients in their seventies and eighties, and almost every one of them tells me the same thing when we start: “My balance got bad because I got weak.”

Strength matters. But for most people, most of the time, weakness isn’t the main reason. And once you see why, you’ll understand why the usual fix — a wobble board, a squishy half-ball at the gym, standing on one leg — is aimed at the wrong target when it comes first.

Three Ways Your Body Knows Where It Is

You don’t have one balance sense. You have three, all feeding your brain at the same time.

- **Your inner ear.** Tiny fluid-filled canals and sensors that feel motion and which way your head is tipped. A built-in level.
- **Your body sense.** Sensors in your muscles, tendons, joints, and the soles of your feet, reporting where every part of you is. Science calls this *proprioception*. It’s how you can touch your nose with your eyes closed.
- **Your eyes.** An outside reference for what’s level and

what isn’t.

Your brain blends all three into the feeling you call balance. When one of them is off, the other two have to work harder to cover for it.

Where Balance Really Starts

Here’s the part most people miss. All three of those systems sit on top of your structure. If your structure is slumped, they’re working from a tilted platform all day long.

You’ve already seen one example in Chapter 10. When your spine collapses forward, your inner ear still wants your eyes level with the world, so your neck cranks your

head back up to find the horizon. That's a balance system doing a rescue job, every day, because the body underneath it gave way.

And remember the beam from Chapter 7? Lying on the floor, easy. Up on two ladders, your whole body tenses and shakes. A poorly organized body is a little bit on that beam all day. It's using up attention just holding itself up, so it has less left over to catch you when something goes wrong.

Organize your structure, and your balance systems finally get a level, steady platform to read from. Your balance doesn't improve because the balance system got stronger. It improves because the structure underneath stopped making it compensate. That's your Power

Stance, and unlike a wobble board, it goes with you everywhere: the kitchen, the parking lot, a dark hallway.

Saving a Wobble Isn’t the Same as Not Wobbling

When trainers say a wobble board teaches you to “catch yourself,” they don’t mean catching yourself with your hands on the ground. They mean saving it partway: you’ve started to tip, and your body scrambles to stop the tip before you ever reach the floor. That’s a real skill. Early in a slip, a quick step or a shift of your hips can save you, and an organized body can do that faster.

But notice what that is. It’s recovery training. It teaches you

what to do after you've lost your balance. It doesn't fix why you lost it.

And look at what the gym version asks for. Real slips almost always start with you upright, on two feet or stepping from one foot to the other, when the floor suddenly isn't where you expected it. That's the moment worth training. The gym version starts somewhere else entirely: bent over on one leg, on a wobbling surface, a weight in one hand, like a figure skater gliding with one leg stretched out behind her. That position is already far off balance. In real life, once you're that far gone, you aren't balancing anymore. You're on your way to the ground.

Balance is very specific. You get good at exactly what you practice. A skater practices that pose because she performs it. For the rest of us, it's a circus act. It's impressive to watch, and it makes you better at the circus act.

What helps you at that point is different: a split second to realize you're going down, and enough calm to go with it. Tuck, turn, and roll, instead of letting your nervous system throw out a stiff arm to stop you. More on that at the end of this chapter.

Preventing a fall and recovering from one are two different skills. Both matter. But they come in order. A body that hasn't found its balance on steady ground yet doesn't have much to react with

on unsteady ground. Putting it on a wobbling surface doesn’t train it. It just recreates the conditions of a fall.

And think about the setup. Most people I see doing this are out in the open middle of a gym floor, with nothing to grab if they tip, and a room full of people watching. The worry about falling in front of strangers takes attention too, from the very same place balance needs it.

Many good trainers and therapists already work in the order I’m about to show you: steady ground first, something solid within reach, and harder challenges only when the easier ones are truly easy. If yours does, you’re in good hands.

Build It in Order

Here’s the progression I use. Stay on flat, steady ground the whole time, and always within arm’s reach of something solid you could grab in an instant: a wall, a kitchen counter, a sturdy chair back, a rack. Move to the next step only when the one before it feels easy.

1. **Both feet, eyes open, in your Power Stance.** Just standing organized already takes away a lot of gravity’s pull on you.
2. **Both feet, eyes closed.** For most people, this is easy. That’s your body sense doing its job.

3. **One foot, eyes open.** Now your body sense has only one small spot to work from. This is a real step up.
4. **One foot, eyes closed.** This is where it gets hard for almost everyone. No eyes to help, one narrow base. Take your time here.
5. **One foot, eyes open, bending forward from the hip.** Bend your knee as much as you need. The moment your head tips forward, everything changes. Your inner ear feels the tilt. Your eyes lose the horizon and see the floor coming up at you. And the weight on your foot slides toward your toes. All three systems have to

rebalance at once, and most people wobble right away. That wobble is the lesson. It shows you how much just bending over throws your balance off.

6. **The same bend, eyes closed.** Now your inner ear and your body sense have to do it without your eyes. Go slowly, and only as far down as you can come back up from.
7. **All the way down to pick something up off the floor,** still on one foot, eyes open. That’s the whole thing, done as a real task.

Is it your legs? When you wobble on that bend, most people blame weak legs. Usually, it isn’t. Notice

that steps 5 and 6 ask the exact same thing of your muscles: same leg, same bend, same weight. The only difference is your eyes. If weak legs were the problem, closing your eyes wouldn't change anything. But it does, a lot. What changed was the information coming in, not the strength. Bending over tips your inner ear into an angle it rarely sees, takes the horizon away from your eyes, and shifts the weight on your foot, all at once. Your balance didn't fail because you were weak. It got confusing signals. Strength still matters, and some people do need more of it. But far more often, the wobble is a signal problem, not a muscle problem. And a signal problem gets better with practice, not heavier weights.

Only after all of that is truly easy does an unstable surface start to make sense. And even then, ask how often you'll actually need it. Most of your life is spent on floors, sidewalks, and stairs. Master the ground you really live on first.

If you get dizzy or have trouble with vertigo, or if you're unsure about your balance at all, check with your doctor first, and have someone with you while you practice.

A Better Way to Train the Save

If I want to train someone to stay upright when something knocks them off balance, I borrow from martial arts. Two people stand

face to face, hands or forearms lightly touching. They move slowly, feeling each other's weight, and each one tries, gently, to nudge the other off balance. Some practice it with their eyes closed. Tai chi calls this *push hands*.

It works because it's honest. You're upright, the way you are when a real slip starts. And the push comes when your partner decides, not when you're ready, the same way ice surprises you. Your body learns to feel the shift early and organize itself in that split second, instead of freezing or flailing. That's balance and muscle coordination working together, the way real life asks for them.

It comes in order. In martial arts, you first practice a movement in its full, perfect form, over and over, until your body knows it. That practice is called a *kata*. The Power Stance is learned the same way. First the full expression, all the way set, the way Chapter 4 describes. Then the degrees: turning it up and down like the dimmer switch from Chapter 9. Only after that do you start playing with outside forces, letting someone push you a little off balance, and pushing back.

Every part of it is give and take. You work inside the range your Power Stance can hold today, and that range grows as you do. And here's the payoff: the better you get at handling outside forces, the

less you have to leave your own center to do it. A beginner gets nudged and has to step, lean, or grab. Someone with years of practice takes the same nudge and barely moves. None of us are grandmasters. We all work within our own limits, and the limits keep moving.

A word about tai chi. The name covers a lot of different things. Most tai chi you'll see in a park, a class, or online is the solo form: slow, flowing movements done alone, shifting your weight from foot to foot. That has real value, and it's the kind most fall-prevention research has studied. Push hands is a different practice, done with a partner, and many classes never teach it. Chair tai

chi is different again. It helps people who can't stand, but a regular chair folds you to ninety degrees, the position Chapter 10 warns about. If that's your class, sit on a block or wedge so your hips are higher than your knees.

So if you want to train the save, don't just look for the words "tai chi." Look for someone who teaches upright partner work that asks your body to react.

This is partner work, and it's best learned in person. Start slow and gentle, with a wall or rail within reach, and with someone who knows how to teach it. Pushing each other around in the living room is how people get hurt.

Listen to Your Instincts

Watch what anyone does on loose gravel or a steep, slippery trail. Nobody stands up tall. They slow down, bend their knees, and drop their hips lower. Remember the beam: the moment it went up on the ladders, every person's body did the same thing without being told.

That's a healthy nervous system protecting you. Good balance training works with that instinct. Standing tall on a wobbling ball with a weight held out to the side asks you to fight it.

When the Lights Go Out

Here's a moment almost everyone has lived through. The power goes out, and suddenly you're standing

in complete darkness. One of your three balance systems just switched off with no warning.

Most people tense up, throw their hands out, and move stiff and fast. That’s backwards. Fear tightens everything, and a tight body balances worse, not better.

Instead, stop. Take a breath. Settle into a relaxed Power Stance, not a stiff one. Then move slowly and on purpose. The same balanced, organized body that keeps you steady in daylight keeps you steady in the dark.

Sometimes the Goal Is Falling Right

Even a well-organized body slips sometimes. Black ice you never

saw. A curb you misjudged. What happens in the next split second is where being relaxed and organized really pays off.

A tense body falls faster. Squeeze an ice cube hard between two fingers and it doesn't slide out gently. It shoots out, all at once. A stiff body meeting ice does the same thing. Nothing in the ankle, knee, hip, or spine gives a little, so the whole slip happens in one instant.

A tense body reacts worse. It's already spending its attention just holding itself together. When it starts to go down, the only thing left is the most basic reflex there is: throw one stiff arm straight out and land on it. That's how wrists, elbows, and shoulders get broken.

A relaxed, organized body has time. Its joints can give a little and spread the slip out, so it doesn't all happen at once. And it has attention to spare. That buys you a split second. Boxers know how much a split second matters: it's the difference between slipping a punch and taking it on the chin. In a fall, that split second is enough to stop fighting to stay up and start falling the right way: turning, tucking, and letting the fall spread across your side and back instead of landing on one locked arm.

Learning to fall well is a real skill, and it's best learned in person, on a soft surface, with someone who knows how to teach it. But it starts with the same thing as

everything else in this book: a body that isn’t fighting itself.

Same slip. Same ice. Two very different outcomes. The difference isn’t luck. It’s whether your body had anything left to spend when it needed it most.

Chapter 15 — Feet, Shoes, and Walking

Where You Meet the Ground

Each of your feet has 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than a hundred muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Put both feet together, and they hold about a quarter of all the bones in your body, all packed into something small enough to fit in a shoe.

Everything you are rests on them. Every step, every lift, every moment you stand. So when something above goes out of line, your feet end up paying for it. The surprise isn’t that feet develop

problems. The surprise is how well they hold up.

Three Ways Feet Get Hurt

From above. Remember the totem pole from Chapter 5. When your shoulders and upper body slump forward, everything below shifts to keep you from tipping over, all the way down to the ground. By the time it reaches your feet, the arch is holding up a body it was never meant to hold up alone, and it starts to flatten and roll inward.

From the ground. For nearly all of human history, feet walked on dirt, sand, grass, and rock. Every step was a little different, and the foot bent, spread, and adjusted to

meet it. Now we spend our lives on flat, hard floors that never change and never give. The foot stops adjusting, because there's nothing to adjust to, and the jolt of every step comes straight back up the leg. Cushioned shoes and arch supports were invented to fix that.

From the shoe itself. A narrow, pointed toe box squeezes your toes together, year after year, and can help push the big toe into a bunion. A raised heel tips your weight forward onto the ball of your foot and the base of your toes, and can help curl the toes into hammertoes. That isn't your posture or the ground. It's the shape of the shoe.

Where Heels Came From

Here’s a story most people don’t know. As it’s usually told, raised heels began about a thousand years ago with horseback archers in Persia. A heel locked the foot into the stirrup so a rider could stand up and shoot a bow. Owning a horse meant wealth, so the heel became a sign of status. It spread into European fashion, and eventually into everyday shoes that never went near a horse.

So the heel didn’t come from anyone trying to help your feet. It came from horses and fashion. Hard floors just came along later.

Walking Is a Controlled Fall

Every step you take, you let your body tip forward a little, then catch yourself with the other foot. That’s walking: a fall, caught over and over.

Where you catch it makes all the difference.

Two Ways to Take a Step

Watch people walk, and you’ll see two very different steps.

The slumped walker. Shoulders forward, head out front, the body tipping ahead of the feet. To keep from falling on their face, they reach each foot far out in front. The leg locks straight, and the heel slams down. There’s no give in it. The whole jolt runs up through the knee, the hip, and the

lower back, and then the body vaults up and over that stiff leg like a pole vaulter going over the pole. Step after step, thousands of times a day.

The organized walker. Shoulder blades back, core closed, the body balanced over the feet. The foot lands closer to underneath them, with the knee slightly soft. It lands firm, but it doesn't slam. Then it gives for a split second as the arch softens to fit the ground and take the landing. Then it firms back up and pushes off, and the body rolls forward smoothly instead of vaulting.

Land, give, push. That's what a foot is built to do on every step. The slumped walker never gets the chance, because the heel slam

uses up the “give” before it can happen. Fix the posture above, and the foot gets its job back.

Why the slumped walker gets shin splints. The muscle on the front of your shin works twice on every step. At the back of your stride, it lifts your toes so they clear the floor as your leg swings forward. And when your heel lands in front, it brakes your foot so it doesn’t slap down.

The slumped walker overworks it at both ends. In back, a stiff leg that doesn’t bend well at the knee leaves the foot less room to clear the ground, so the toes have to be lifted harder and longer. In front, the heel lands far out ahead, and that muscle has to brake harder with every slam, while the jolt

runs straight up the shin bone. Thousands of steps later, the shin starts to hurt. That’s a big part of why shin splints are so common in people who reach out ahead of themselves, and why a standard fix for runners is shorter steps that land closer to underneath them.

The organized walker, jogger, or runner does the opposite. The knee lifts, the foot comes down underneath the body, and the push-off finishes under and behind you, sending you forward instead of braking you. The faster you go, the more this matters. Walking asks a little of it, and sprinting asks the most. The principle is the same at every speed.

The Small Muscle Behind Your Knee

Behind your knee sits a small muscle called the popliteus. Its job is to unlock your knee so it can bend. When your foot is planted, it does that by turning your thigh bone a few degrees on top of your shin. It also helps keep your thigh bone from sliding forward over your shin, and it gently pulls the outer cushion of your knee, the meniscus, out of the way so it doesn’t get pinched.

It doesn’t work alone. It’s part of a team at the back and outer side of your knee that works with your knee ligaments to control twisting. Surgeons know how much that team matters. When it’s badly hurt and missed, even a

rebuilt ligament is more likely to fail.

Doctors also know this muscle gets hurt from sprinting and running downhill, especially with long, reaching strides.

My own hypothesis is that the slumped walker does a smaller version of the same thing on flat ground, thousands of times a day. The foot reaches out, the knee slams straight into its lock, and the body has to pry it back open with every step. If that small muscle wears down, I believe the ligaments and the meniscus it helps protect pick up more of the load, slowly, over years. Fix the stride from the top down, and the whole team gets back to sharing the work.

Sideways

Moving side to side asks even more, because your hips and knees are built mostly for going forward. I see this all the time with weekend tennis players chasing a ball that's just out of reach. The upper body goes first: it opens up and reaches. The short, quick steps turn into one long, desperate lunge on a straight leg. The knee locks and takes the hit. The player never thought about the knee. It just inherited what the upper body gave up a half second earlier.

Keep your Power Stance as you move sideways, with knees soft, hips low, and your body leaning into the direction you're going, and your legs can keep bending

and giving the way they were built to.

It’s Usually Not a Balance Problem

A foot that drags and catches. A stride that feels unsteady. A stumble out of nowhere. These usually get called a balance problem, and the fix is a wobble board.

But think about how much goes into one ordinary step: the ankle lifting to clear the ground, the knee bending to swing through, the hips staying level, the core holding steady, the arms swinging against the legs, all timed together. When your structure collapses anywhere in that chain, the whole step gets sloppy. From

the outside, it looks like bad balance. Usually, it’s the same collapse this book keeps describing, just showing up in your walk. It’s the same lesson as Chapter 14: often it’s the signal and the structure, not the balance system itself.

Fix It From the Top First

You can buy the best shoes in the world, and a slumped body will still reach out and slam its heels. So start where this whole book starts: at the top. Find your Power Stance. Pull your shoulders back over your center. Your stride shortens on its own, your foot lands closer to underneath you, and less force reaches your feet in any shoe you wear.

Then, if you want, think about shoes.

Barefoot? Your Choice

In my studio, people can take their shoes off if they want to. It's a chance to feel the floor, and it gives me a chance to look at their feet: whether the toes spread naturally, how the arches look, and whether there are any old injuries I should know about.

But I leave it up to them, and here's why. Going barefoot is the natural setting for a foot that lives on dirt, grass, and sand. It isn't automatically right for a foot that has spent decades on flat floors inside cushioned shoes.

And be honest about the rest of your day. If your job needs dress shoes, or your life has you in supportive shoes most of the time, switching to bare feet for an hour here and there asks your feet to change back and forth between two different worlds. That can cause more trouble than it solves. I don’t want to be the reason someone got trapped between a good idea and a life that doesn’t fit it.

If you do want to go barefoot or wear minimal shoes, do it in the right order. Fix your posture first, so your stride shortens and your foot lands under you. Then make the change slowly. Take away the cushion before your stride is fixed, and that heel slam goes

straight into a foot that was never prepared for it. Then people blame the shoes, when the real problem was the step.

Nothing Stands Alone

Your feet and your hips are wired together, through your brain. What happens at the bottom of your body changes what the deep muscles near your spine do, whether you notice it or not.

There’s an old children’s song about this. It walks from bone to bone, the foot bone connected to the leg bone, all the way up the body. Kids have been singing it for generations, long before scientists called it anything. They knew it

was true. Your feet were never separate from the rest of you.

Chapter 16 — Walk Into Any Gym

Where the Pattern Gets Built

The gym is where you practice. The same movement, the same weight, over and over, on purpose. That’s exactly what your nervous system needs to learn something new. Real life doesn’t give you that. It throws things at you in no particular order. That makes life a poor place to learn, but it’s exactly where what you learned gets tested.

Here’s the catch: the gym doesn’t care what you repeat. Good reps groove a good pattern. Sloppy reps groove a sloppy one, deeper

every set. The gym will build whatever you feed it.

The One Rule I Never Break

Before a new client does a single rep of anything, I tell them this: if your Power Stance isn’t in place, the exercise isn’t correct yet. And correct is what makes it safe, and what makes it work.

That’s why I don’t let a brand new client near a real exercise on day one, and sometimes not for the first several sessions. We start with the plain, unglamorous work of finding and holding the Power Stance itself. Skip that, and every exercise after it inherits the same disorganization you walked in with.

Stop. Organize. Load. Observe. Adjust. Progress.

In the gym, “stop, organize, then move” gets a few more steps. Stop. Organize: set your Power Stance. Load: add the weight. Observe: watch for anything that slips when the weight shows up, like elbows drifting or ribs lifting. That’s where your phone video earns its keep. Adjust. Only then, progress. The order never changes.

Muscle Doesn’t Care About Form

You’ve probably seen someone with an amazing body training in ways this book warns against. It happens. Muscle grows when you

give it enough work, whether your form is right or not.

But muscle isn’t the only thing taking the load. Your tendons, ligaments, discs, and joint surfaces carry it too, and they don’t get bigger or look better for it. They just wear, quietly, rep after rep. The muscle gets the reward. The joints pay the bill, and the bill usually comes years later.

Remember Dr. Del Rosario from Chapter 2? Years of all-out training built plenty of muscle, and his joints hurt so much he couldn’t bench press anymore. When we slowed down and built everything on the Power Stance, the pain went away, and his

muscle development got better, not worse.

The Gym Is a Controlled Place

A few years ago, I was a guest on a local podcast. A lot of the listeners play tennis, and the hosts asked me whether tennis is healthy. My honest answer wasn't the one they wanted, so here's the fuller one.

Tennis is great for your heart, your athleticism, and your social life. But it's a reactive sport. The ball decides where you go and when. So does the other player. Under that kind of pressure, the body reaches too far, the core opens at the wrong moment, and the knees and ankles take hits

they weren’t ready for. That’s true of most ball sports.

The gym is different. So are yoga and martial arts practice. You decide how and when your body moves. Gravity never changes its mind.

That isn’t a reason to quit your sport. It’s a reason to know the trade. The gym is where you build the shell. Your sport is where the shell gets tested.

Three Questions for Any Machine

Once your Power Stance is yours, you can walk into any gym in the world and judge any machine in a few seconds. Sit in it or stand at it, and ask:

1. Can I set my shoulder blades back and down?
2. Can I close my core?
3. Can I get the lean from my hip socket, or sit at an angle that lets me?

Three yeses, and you can use it. Any no, and you either change something or walk away. The machine doesn’t set the rules. Your body does.

Change the Setup First

Walking away isn’t your only option. Most people force themselves to fit whatever is in front of them: the flat floor, the fixed seat, the angle the machine came with. You don’t have to. Raise the seat. Put a wedge or a

pad under you so your hips sit higher than your knees, the 120-degree rule from Chapter 10. Put a block under your feet. Move the bench. Change the setup until your body can organize itself, and then do the exercise.

Skip the Mirror

Most gyms are lined with mirrors, and most people train watching themselves in them. It feels like it should help. In my experience, it usually does the opposite.

Turn to look at yourself from the side, and your head and neck rotate. The rest of your body follows, a little at every joint, and your balanced tension starts pulling out of line. Your attention

goes to the picture instead of the feeling. You end up practicing a twisted version of the exercise.

Here’s something else I’ve watched for years. Someone who still glances at the mirror to check their Power Stance hasn’t truly learned it yet. Once it’s real, it falls into place on its own. You don’t need to look.

When you need to check yourself, record a set from the side with your phone and watch it afterward. The goal is to learn what right feels like, so you can find it without looking at all.

The Machine Wasn’t Built for You

Every machine moves along one fixed path. You can slide the seat up, down, forward, or back, but the path the handles travel never changes. It was built for an average arm, an average torso, an average reach. A six-foot-six man and a five-foot-three woman don't move through space the same way, and no seat adjustment changes that.

That's why two machines that look exactly alike, in two different gyms, can feel completely different. Your three questions will tell you before you lift a pound.

"Junkyard" Machines

Spend any time around gyms or online fitness videos and you'll hear it: this machine is great, that one belongs in the junkyard. Here's the truth. Most machines aren't good or bad on their own. A machine can hurt you if you don't know how to adjust your body to it, and that's usually why people call it junk.

A lot of gym equipment is built to save money and floor space, not to fit your body. The low, flat seat that folds you into a ninety-degree bend is the most common example. Sometimes you can fix it. Sometimes you can't. When a machine won't let you set up your Power Stance, walk away from it. That's not quitting. That's good judgment.

Gyms also have to keep a lot of people busy at once, so they fill the floor with variety: new machines, new angles, new ways to do the same thing. Many of them look at the body one flat muscle at a time. They keep things interesting, but you don't need most of them. If you want real results and want to get in and out of the gym, you need surprisingly few pieces of equipment, used well.

And sometimes a "bad" machine becomes one of your best tools once you use it differently. Your muscles build the most strength and flexibility in their lengthened range, the stretched end of the movement. Many machines are a problem only because they push

you through a full range your joints don’t like. Use that same machine to load the lengthened part of the movement, lowering a heavy weight slowly and under control, with your Power Stance set, and it can turn from something to avoid into one of the most useful machines in the room. The machine didn’t change. How you used it did.

Full Range of What?

Coaches say it all the time: “Full range of motion.” “Go deeper.” Good advice. But full range of *what*?

Most people chase the only range they can feel, the point where the joint bottoms out. To get there,

they let everything else go. The shoulders roll forward. The core opens. The weight goes all the way down, the rep looks complete, and everyone's happy. But by then the muscle wasn't doing the work anymore. The joint and its tendons were taking the load, at their weakest angle.

There's another range: the longest your *muscle* can get while your Power Stance still holds. Shoulder blades set, core closed, and the muscle stretched long and still working. That point comes before your joint hits its end. It's where real strength and flexibility are built, the lengthened range from the junkyard section.

So watch for two mistakes. Some people bounce down into the

joint’s end and lose everything at the bottom. Others never get anywhere near it. They swing and sway to fake the rest of the rep, and the muscle never works long at all. The right rep goes deep with the muscle, not the joint.

How far, how slow, and how long to stay down there depend on your body. That’s what I teach in person.

Learn the Why

I once talked with a young man who had trained with a personal trainer almost every day for years. Then his trainer moved away, and he realized he didn’t know how to train on his own. He knew the

exercises, but not why he was doing them, or what to feel for.

Many good trainers teach the why: why this exercise, what it's doing, where your attention belongs. If yours does, you're in good hands. Either way, this book is meant to give you that understanding, so you can judge any exercise and any machine for yourself, with or without someone standing next to you.

Chapter 17 — Pressing, Pulling, and Other Lifts

This chapter walks through the lifts I’m asked about most. You won’t find sets, reps, or schedules here. Those depend on your body, and they’re what I teach in person. What you’ll find is how to set each one up so your Power Stance can do its job.

Your First Exercise: Shoulder Blades Only

Before any pressing or pulling, there’s one exercise that comes first: pulling your shoulder blades back and down against a light weight, and nothing else.

Stand facing a cable machine set at about shoulder height, or a resistance band tied to something solid. Hold the handle with your arms out in front of you, elbows nearly straight. Now pull your shoulder blades back and down, the same beach ball move from Chapter 3. Your arms don’t bend. Your elbows don’t travel back. Only your shoulder blades move. Then let them forward again, slowly, and repeat.

That’s it. It looks like almost nothing. But this is where the Ping Pong Effect from Chapter 4 shows up for real: the moment there’s weight in your hand, your body wants to bend the elbows and use the big back muscles

instead. Every clean rep teaches your nervous system the new way.

You can do the same thing on a seated row machine. Most people use it by yanking their elbows back past their body, which turns it into a big-back-muscle exercise. Use it as a teacher instead: chest against the pad, elbows nearly straight, and only your shoulder blades moving. If you sit, raise the seat so your hips are higher than your knees.

Push Like You’re Pushing a Car

Here’s something your body already knows. Go push a heavy cart, or picture pushing a stalled car. Watch what you do without being told. Your elbows drop down

close to your sides. Your hands come in closer to your body. Your shoulder blades pull back, and your upper back tightens. Nobody pushes a car with straight arms stuck way out in front and shoulders rolled forward.

That’s your body telling you how to press something heavy. Keep that picture in mind for every press in this chapter.

The Chest Press

You’ll often hear this cue on a chest press: push all the way out until your shoulders roll forward, then squeeze your hands together hard at the finish. It sounds like it should build a bigger chest.

Under a heavy weight, it mostly builds shoulder trouble.

Reaching your shoulders forward is fine for light jobs: throwing a ball, reaching for a cup. But under a heavy load, it asks a small, shallow shoulder joint to manage a lot of moving parts at the exact moment the weight is heaviest. Your body has room for error with a light weight. With a heavy one, you're one bad rep from an injury.

There's a second problem. When your back is against a pad, shoulder blades pulled back give you something solid to press from: two flat bones against the pad. Let them slide forward, and that solid base disappears. You end up pressing off the curve of your upper back, your neck bends

forward, and your chin drops toward your chest. Under a heavy set, the weight can pin your shoulders there, and you finish every rep rolled forward. That's the worst way to finish a set.

And that deep cramp you feel when your hands cross and squeeze at the finish? Most people take it as proof they did it right. It's closer to the opposite. It's the muscle telling you it just left the range where it works well.

If a stronger chest is your goal, do less, not more: shoulder blades set, core closed, and the arms traveling only as far as your Power Stance holds. That isn't a smaller exercise. It's a more exact one.

With cables or dumbbells, each hand moves on its own, so each hand needs rules. Your hands never cross the middle of your body. Your wrists stay right over your elbows, or just a little wider, never inside them. And think of each handle as a coffee mug. At the finish, don’t pour the coffee into your lap by rolling your thumbs down. Keep the mug upright, or tip it slightly outward. That keeps your upper arm seated in the shoulder socket instead of sliding forward.

The Bench Press

Most people learn the bench press by copying competition lifters. That’s understandable. They’re the ones moving the big weights.

But competition bench pressing is a sport technique, built for one goal: moving the most weight possible, one time, under that sport's rules. The big arch in the back, the feet driving into the floor, the bar path: all of it is extraordinary technique for that goal. It was never meant to be the healthiest way to build your chest or protect your shoulders for the next forty years.

Even the equipment works against you. On a standard bench, the hooks sit high, so you reach up and roll your shoulders forward just to lift the bar off. The moment its weight comes down on you, it pins your shoulders right there, before your first rep.

The Body Logic bench changes the setup:

- **Feet up.** Put your feet on boxes or upright dumbbells instead of the floor. With your knees up, your hips can sit at an angle where your core can close. Your lower back settles into its natural gentle curve. Not flat, and not arched.
- **Set your shoulder blades first.** Use a rack with safety bars, set just below the bottom of your range, so if you slip or fail, the bar lands on the bars and never on you. Start with the bar resting on them at the bottom. Grip the bar, pull your shoulder blades back and down, and settle onto the bench. The bar's

weight now holds your shoulder blades in the right place instead of the wrong one.

- **Bar over the shoulders.** The bar travels straight up and down over your shoulder sockets, not down toward your belly.
- **Elbows out to the sides, down to about ninety degrees.** Find your grip from your elbows. Set your elbows out to the sides, stack your wrists right over them, and wherever your hands land on the bar is your grip. For most people, the bottom is about where your upper arms are level with your body. Some bodies go a little deeper. Your

Power Stance will show you where yours is.

You'll lift less weight this way. That's on purpose. The chest does the work, the shoulders stay safe, and because the safety bars catch the weight, you can take a set all the way to your pop off valve (Chapter 8) without anyone spotting you.

The Dip

The dip is one exercise where almost every coach already gives the right cue: lean forward. That lean is your hip pivot from Chapter 3, the dipping bird. Lean into your Power Stance, let your elbows travel out a little to the

sides, and stop at about ninety degrees.

Going deeper isn’t better. Past that point, your shoulder blades start sliding forward and the top of your arm drifts forward in the socket, the same shoulder trouble as the chest press. And dipping straight up and down, with your ribs flared open, turns it into a shoulder and triceps exercise instead of a chest one.

The Shoulder Fails Quietly

Remember from Chapter 8 that the pop off valve can’t catch slow damage. The shoulder is where that matters most.

When your elbows go too deep, or your shoulder blades drift forward

on rep after rep, the top of your arm bone slides a little forward in its socket each time. No single rep feels dangerous. And tendons don’t send pain signals the way muscles do, so early wear often doesn’t hurt at all. By the time it finally does, the damage has usually been building for months or years.

That’s why so many strong lifters tell me their shoulder is “wrecked” and they don’t know why, like the ones in Chapter 11. And it’s why I don’t wait for pain in the shoulder. I build the correct shoulder blade position in from day one, on purpose, before the joint ever gets a chance to wear down quietly.

The Preacher Curl

Picture a cliff rescue. Someone has fallen over the edge and is hanging on. You lie on your belly and reach down as far as you can: arm straight, shoulder stretched all the way forward. That's the right choice, because every inch matters. But when you start pulling them up, you don't curl with your biceps from that stretched-out spot. You pull your shoulder blade back first, and that brings your arm into a safer angle before your biceps take the load.

The preacher bench puts your arm in that same stretched-out rescue position, with no reason to be there, and asks your biceps to start the lift from the most dangerous spot in the whole

movement. People really do tear their biceps tendons this way. Lighter weight isn’t the whole answer, because the problem is where the lift starts.

If you use a preacher bench, set your Power Stance first, don’t start from a fully straight arm, and don’t let your shoulder blades slide forward on the way down.

Skull Crushers

When skull crushers hurt your elbows, the usual cause is a narrow grip that puts your wrists inside your elbows. Widen your grip until your wrists sit right over your elbows, and that twisting force goes away. A one-arm cable triceps extension is

even kinder to the joint, because your wrist can find its own natural angle.

Leg Curls and Leg Extensions

On the seated leg curl, most people push the seat back and recline, and the machine practically begs them to let their core go. Sit upright instead, and let your hips close as your legs come up. That keeps your knee out of its last, locked-out bit of straightening and puts less strain on the hamstring tendon where it attaches.

On the leg extension, most people do the opposite: seat forward and up. Instead, move the seat back and work one leg at a time. Turn

your body slightly so the working leg is more forward, sitting more on the opposite hip, and lean back into your Power Stance.

Why one leg at a time? Think about how your legs actually work. You walk one leg at a time, and your hips and spine turn a little with every step. The only way both legs would ever straighten together, perfectly even, is if you hopped like a bunny rabbit. A two-legged leg extension asks for exactly that. Then pile on a heavy weight, and the pad clamps both legs straight and square, with no room to turn. As your knee nears straight, it wants to make that small natural twist. With both legs clamped square under a heavy pad, it can’t do it

freely. And the force doesn’t just disappear. Your body can’t invent a new path for the joint, so the load lands on the joint surfaces and the ligaments that were supposed to guide that turn. In forty-five years, I’ve watched that show up again and again as knee pain, strain on one side of the joint, and hips that don’t like it either. Your body just isn’t built to work that way.

Then, in the last part of the lift, as your knee nears straight, turn the whole leg slightly inward as one piece, from the hip. Your toes will point a little toward the middle. Don’t twist your foot or your knee to do it. The turn comes from the top of the thigh bone, and everything below simply follows.

That copies what your thigh does over a planted foot every time you take a step. As you lower back toward a bend, let the leg turn back to straight ahead.

The knee twists either way. Remember the popliteus, the small muscle behind your knee from Chapter 15? You may read that it unlocks your knee by turning your shin. That's true here, at the top of a leg extension, where your leg is straight and your foot is in the air. But when you walk, stand, or squat, your foot is planted and your shin can't turn. So the same muscle turns your thigh bone instead. In a normal step, that happens before your foot ever leaves the ground.

Same twist, same muscle. Only the bone that moves is different.

My clients and I both notice the same thing when we do it this way: the knee feels happier, and the whole front of the thigh works harder, all the way up to the hip.

The Barbell Squat

The barbell back squat is a great tool for competition. For most people training for health, it starts every rep at a disadvantage. Getting the bar onto your upper back takes a lot of shoulder, upper-back, and wrist flexibility, and I've seen very few people who can set it there with their shoulder blades back and their wrists straight. For most bodies,

the compromise starts before the first rep. From there, it’s hard to keep your core closed.

There are better options for health. A safety squat bar has handles out in front, so your wrists and shoulders don’t get twisted. A goblet squat, holding one weight in front of your chest, naturally helps your core close and your hips find the lean.

A Different Kind of Contest

I’ve always thought there should be a Power Stance lifting contest, where the rules come from the body instead of the sport. Core closed the whole time. Shoulder blades back from start to finish. Bar over the shoulders. Feet up.

No arch. And the pop off valve as the judge.

The numbers would be much lower than any contest you've seen. But they'd measure something real: how strong a body is when it's truly organized.

Chapter 18 — Your Abs Are Brakes

This book has talked about your core since Chapter 1. Closing it. Bracing it. Letting it tell you when to stop. But I’ve never shown you how to train your abs on purpose. This chapter does. It starts with why the most famous ab exercise of all can quietly wear you down.

The Pain Comes Later

Some parts of your body can’t feel much. The inside of a spinal disc is one of them. Only its outer edge has nerves. So you can load a disc the wrong way for years and feel nothing.

Then one day it hurts. That isn't the start of the problem. It's the end of it. The wear has finally reached a part that can feel.

You saw the same thing with the shoulder in Chapter 17: years of quiet wear, then sudden pain. By then, some of the damage may not undo.

So "it doesn't hurt" doesn't mean "it's safe." Keep that in mind as you read about the sit-up.

The Heave

Lie on the floor and do one slow sit-up. Pay attention.

The first part is easy. You curl up a little. That's your abs pulling your ribs toward your hips. It's also

why crunches got popular: people stopped right there.

Then you hit a spot where you get stuck. To get the rest of the way up, you have to heave yourself up and over. That heave isn't your abs anymore. They've done all they can. Your hip muscles take over and pull you up, bending you at the femoral hip socket.

One of those hip muscles is the psoas, from Chapter 5. It's anchored to the bones of your lower back. So right when your lower back is already rounded, a strong muscle starts pulling hard on it. That's a bad place to put a load.

I broke my back at fifteen, so I feel that heave in my spine every

time. You don’t need a broken back to have the same problem. You just haven’t felt it yet. Remember: the pain comes later.

The Floor Stops You Short

There’s a second problem with the floor. You start lying flat, so your abs can never get any longer than flat.

Chapter 16 showed that muscles build the most strength and flexibility in their long range. A sit-up on the floor never lets your abs get there. It only works them short.

Now watch someone swing across monkey bars, the quick flip from Chapter 9. Their middle opens and closes with every swing.

That’s the abs working long and short. It’s small, but it’s the real thing.

Your Abs Are Brakes

Most people train their abs like a hinge. Curl up, curl down.

But think about what your core does all day in your Power Stance. Its job isn’t to curl you. Its job is to stop you. It keeps your lower back from arching or bending too far.

Your abs are brakes. Train them that way.

Closing Your Core Isn’t Sucking In

Closing your core doesn’t mean sucking your belly button in toward your spine. You may have seen the stage version, where bodybuilders hollow out their stomach to show the smallest possible waist. That’s built for looks, not strength.

Think about it. Nobody sucks in their belly to lift a box, push a stalled car, or carry a child up the stairs. Your body braces instead. The deep belt of muscle around your waist is the hoop on the barrel from Chapter 5, and a hoop is strong when it keeps its shape. Suck one side in, and the hoop caves.

Breaking the Rule on Purpose

In your Power Stance, your core is closed and your back is neutral. That's how you lift, carry, push, and pull. Almost everything you do with a load happens there.

Sometimes your middle has to move: swinging on monkey bars, turning in a kick, twisting to catch a football. But notice that none of those are heavy. A moving core is for getting around, not for lifting.

Training your abs is different. To get stronger, a muscle has to open and close. So here, and only here, we leave neutral on purpose.

But we leave it with control. The brakes never come off.

Long Is Not Stretched

Remember the rubber band from Chapter 12? When most people say “stretch,” they picture something pulled long until it gives. That isn’t what this chapter asks for.

- **Stretched** means the muscle lets go, and something else pulls it long.
- **Lengthened** means the muscle stays on and holds itself long, right at the edge of what it can control.

Everything in this chapter is lengthened, never stretched. When I say “long,” I mean your abs are as long as they can get while still holding on. They’re working. They never let go.

If they let go, that's a stretch. That's a different job, for a different time.

No Dead Man's Hang

The best place I know to train your abs long is hanging from a bar by your hands.

Not a dead man's hang. A dead man's hang is limp: nothing working, the whole body hanging off its joints. I don't want that anywhere in your body. Not in your shoulders, not your back, not your hips.

Grip the bar. Reach long through your arms. Pull your shoulder blades down and back, the same as your Power Stance. Bend your knees. Tighten your middle a

little. Now every part of you is holding its place, and your whole body is helping your abs do their job.

Part of that comes from your grip. A hard squeeze sends a signal up to your brain, and your brain answers by switching on muscles up your arm and around your shoulder. Part of it comes from your back. The big muscles on the sides of your back, your lats, tie into a thick sheet of connective tissue across your lower back. When your shoulder blades pull down, your upper body helps hold your lower back steady from above.

Keep your knees bent. Straight legs hang out like a long lever bar,

and they pull hard on your lower back through that same psoas.

Can’t hold the bar for long? Use wrist wraps. That’s fine. The work comes from your arms reaching and your body staying tight, not from how strong your grip is.

Hanging also takes the squeeze off your spine instead of pressing it into the floor. That helps. But the bigger reason is that your whole body works as one piece.

Hands, Not Slings

Most gyms have a chair you back into with your forearms on pads, or straps you hang from by your elbows. They’re built so grip strength isn’t what stops you. Here’s what they cost you.

They pin your upper back flat and upright. Then, when your legs come up, the five small bones of your lower back do the bending for your whole torso.

They also take away a swing point. Hang from your hands, and you have two: your arms swing from the bar, and your body swings from your shoulders. In my experience, that freedom lets your body find its own line as your core works. A small lean here, a small shift there, until everything pulls together. Wedge your arms into pads, and that’s gone.

Long and Loaded

Hang from your hands, set up the way you just learned. Now let

your abs get long. Your back will arch some. There's no way around that.

Here's the rule: your abs never let go. Go only as long as they can still hold on. Past that, your lower back arches too far, your legs hang down and pull on your spine, and the dead man's hang creeps back in.

When you feel your abs about to lose their grip, that's the end. Stop there. Then close back up with a small, controlled curl, not a big swing.

I also like a partner to give a light tug on my feet while I hold that long position. My job is to stay long without giving in. That one is advanced, and it's best learned in

person. A partner who tugs too hard turns it into the very thing this chapter warns against.

The Kneeling Cable Crunch

You don’t need a bar for this idea. A cable machine works too. Most machines aren’t tall enough to do it standing, so kneel.

Skip the rope handle. It pulls your hands close together, and that rolls your shoulders forward. Use a straight bar or a curved bar, with your hands wider.

Let the cable draw your abs up long. Your elbows lift in front of you, and your lats join in. Then close your middle. Keep it small.

The most common mistake is yanking the bar down by folding at the hip, so the hip muscles do the work. A little hip movement is fine. What you're after is your abs opening and closing.

Go slow. Breathe. Move your arms around until you find the spot where you can feel your middle come alive.

Hanging Upside Down

There's one more version, and most people won't have the setup for it: hanging by your feet and curling up. I like it because my spine is pulled long instead of pushed into the floor, and my whole body works together. It

doesn’t hurt my back the way the floor does.

Hanging upside down raises the pressure in your head and eyes. If you have high blood pressure, glaucoma, a heart problem, or a history of stroke, don’t do it without your doctor’s okay. Everyone else: learn it in person first.

What’s Not Here

Like Chapter 17, this chapter has no sets, reps, or schedules. How long, how far, and how hard depend on your body. That’s what I teach in person.

What you have now is what to look for. Brakes on. Long, but

never let go. And the whole body helping.

Chapter 19 — Common Aches and What’s Behind Them

Most of the aches people bring to me aren’t mysteries. They’re the same few patterns, showing up in different bodies. This chapter walks through the most common ones and what’s usually behind them.

Too Tight or Too Long, Same Ache

Here’s something almost nobody knows: a muscle doesn’t have to be tight to hurt. A muscle stretched too long and held there all day aches just as much as one squeezed too short. You met this

in Chapter 12 with the young woman's neck. Both feel the same: tired, nagging, and always wanting to be rubbed.

So "loosen up" isn't always the answer. Some of your sore muscles are too short. Some are too long. What they all need is to get back to their natural length, and that's what your Power Stance does.

The Neck and Upper Back That Always Want a Massage

If your neck and upper back always seem to want a massage, it isn't bad luck. It's what happens when your shoulders live rolled forward.

- **The muscles on top of your shoulders get short.** The upper part of your trapezius, running from your neck out to your shoulder, stays shortened and a little bit on, all day. That steady tension is tiring, and it can feed tension headaches.
- **The muscles between and below your shoulder blades get long.** The ones that should hold your shoulder blades back and down get stretched and left there. From that position, they can’t do their job.
- **The shoulder joint twists forward.** As your shoulders round, the top of your arm bone turns forward in its

socket, and the small muscles on the back of your shoulder get stretched all day too.

- **The fascia follows along.** The thin web wrapped around these muscles molds to the position you live in. It stops gliding smoothly and develops the knots and sticky spots you can feel with your fingers.

None of this comes from one bad lift or one bad night’s sleep. It comes from years of ordinary days in the same rounded shape.

The fix isn’t a stretch for the tight side plus an exercise for the weak side. It’s your Power Stance. When your shoulder blades go back and down the right way, both sides of the chain move back

toward their natural length at the same time.

When the Head Goes Its Own Way

Sometimes the neck gets cranked forward, down, or up without you ever deciding it. Remember from Chapter 10: your inner ear wants your eyes level with the world, so when your body underneath collapses, your neck bends to drag your head back where your inner ear wants it. Under a weight in the gym, the same slump pulls the chin down toward the chest, right when your neck most needs to stay neutral.

This isn’t really a neck problem. It’s the same collapse showing up at the top. As your Power Stance

becomes your normal, your head settles back on top of your spine, and this mostly stops on its own.

Massage: Shorten First

A good massage can do a lot of good. But how you're positioned on the table changes what the massage can do.

Here's the principle. A muscle that's too short and tight benefits from being worked and eased out. A muscle that's already stretched too long is different. If you lie there with your shoulders rolled forward, those long muscles are still being held stretched, and working deeply into them pulls them even further in the wrong direction. That's often where that

sharp “ouch” comes from, the one people think means the massage is working.

So the long muscles need to be shortened first. Prop the shoulder back into a relaxed, pulled-back position, sometimes with nothing more than a yoga block under it, so those muscles aren’t being held stretched anymore. Then the knots and sticky fascia on top of them can finally be worked out, and the same depth of pressure that used to hurt starts to feel like relief. This idea isn’t mine alone. Manual therapists have a name for working from a shortened, comfortable position: positional release.

In my studio, I use a fully adjustable massage bed so both

the client and I can be positioned in true neutral. The client's body can be set into the exact shortened or lengthened position each area needs, and I'm never working from an awkward angle that makes me rush a spot.

It's the same idea as the slant board and the young woman on the yoga mat: set the body up for neutral first, then do the work.

Many good massage therapists already know this and work this way. If yours does, you're in good hands.

Knees That Cave In

When knees collapse inward during a squat, a lunge, or even climbing stairs, the usual

explanation is a weak muscle on the side of the hip, the gluteus medius. That's a real and fair place to look. And it rarely stops at the knee: as the knee caves in, the foot flattens and rolls in with it, like the arches in Chapter 15.

But don't look at it flat, one piece at a time. That hip muscle can be pulled out of its working position by a pelvis that's already sitting wrong, and the pelvis often traces back higher still, to a core that never closed. The trouble weaves up and down the whole body.

When that hip muscle isn't doing its job, a much smaller muscle on the front and side of the hip tries to take over, and it tightens the long band of tissue running down the outside of your thigh, the IT

band. That tight IT band isn't its own separate problem. It's the end of the chain. Get your Power Stance working, let the core and pelvis organize, and let the hip muscle do its real job, and the IT band usually calms down with it.

The Foam Roller Is a Signal

People have been taught for years to grind a foam roller into a tight IT band, dig a tennis ball into a sore foot, or book another massage for a neck that's always tight.

None of that is wrong. But if you need it constantly, that isn't a sign you found a good recovery routine. It's a sign your posture is making the problem faster than

you can rub it away. Once your body is truly centered and carrying itself well through an ordinary day, most of those tight spots start easing on their own, because the thing that kept recreating them is gone.

That doesn’t mean you’ll never need a massage or a chiropractic adjustment again. Life happens. A real injury or a hard week deserves hands-on care. The question is whether you need that care because of something that just happened to you, or because your posture never stopped happening to you.

Chapter 20 — Why You Were Taught Differently

If the Power Stance is this simple, why didn’t anyone teach it to you before? This chapter is my honest answer. It isn’t about who’s wrong. It’s about how good people, doing their best, ended up looking at the body from a different angle than I do.

A Simple Answer Is Hard to Sell

We’ve all been taught that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. So when the answer is simple, we don’t trust it.

We go looking for something more complicated.

And complicated is easy to find. There's a program, a machine, a certification, an app, or a specialist for everything. Some of it is excellent. But a simple truth is hard to package and sell, and complexity isn't. So the simple answer gets passed over.

Your body didn't make things complicated. Modern life did. For almost all of human history, there were no flat floors, soft chairs, or desks. Those are recent inventions, and your body never had time to adapt to them. The problem is new. The answer is old.

Most people in my field aren't hiding anything. They teach what

they were taught, and they believe it’s right. That’s not dishonesty. It’s just how knowledge gets passed down, and it deserves understanding, not blame.

Big Rooms, Thin Attention

There’s one real trade-off worth naming: the big class. A yoga class, a boot camp, any room full of people can’t give each person the close attention real correction takes. The instructor is trading depth for numbers, the same trade almost any business makes to stay open. You saw what that can cost with the young woman in Chapter 12.

I made a different trade. I've reached a point in my life where I love teaching this more than I need my income to keep climbing. So I won't soften it, and I won't take on more people than I can truly watch.

No Separate Rules for Young and Old

I hear the phrase "age-appropriate training" a lot. Usually it means young people get one approach, older people get another, and losing your structure as you age is just what's supposed to happen.

I don't see it that way. Young people aren't being taught this either. They just have more cartilage to spend before the bill

comes due. And when older people are moved to a “gentler” program, the movements often stay the same, just slower and lighter. The structure underneath never gets fixed.

There’s one standard, for an eight-year-old and an eighty-year-old alike. What changes with age is the load. What never changes is the standard. Some of the best balance improvements I’ve seen have come from clients in their seventies and eighties, not in spite of their age, but because their structure finally got organized.

I’d love to see this taught to kids, starting in kindergarten, while their bodies are still easy to shape and before years of phones and tablets set the slump in place. A

habit is far easier to build right the first time than to fix later. Even something as simple as resting in a potty squat a few times a day, the way toddlers already do, would carry a child a long way.

What Happened to the Word “Yoga”

Yoga began as something deeply restful: breath, stillness, and meditation. The physical postures were there to prepare the body to sit so balanced and still that the mind could let go. India gave the world both yoga and one of the oldest martial arts, Kalaripayattu, around the same time. One was aimed at stillness, one at the fight.

Today, “yoga” covers everything from that quiet, seated stillness to fast, sweaty classes that are really hard exercise. I enjoy a lot of them, and many of the people teaching them are gifted. But in my view, the balance has flipped. The old practice was mostly preparation for stillness. Many modern classes are mostly physical work, with a few minutes of stillness at the end. That’s not an insult to anyone. It just means you should know which end of the line from Chapter 13 your class is really on.

Starting at the Bottom

Much of the fitness and therapy world starts posture correction at the pelvis. Fix the pelvis, the

thinking goes, and the spine will follow. It isn't wrong. But in my forty-five years, it's often out of order.

Picture the most common posture I see: upper back rounded, shoulders forward, lower back arched, pelvis tipped forward. (Therapists have names for the two halves: *upper crossed syndrome* and *lower crossed syndrome*.) Now fix it from the bottom. Squeeze the glutes, pull the belly in, tip the pelvis back toward neutral.

But the shoulders were never touched. The head and upper body are still hanging forward. So the hips have to find a new way to balance under them. Some people push their hips forward into a

sway back. Some flatten their lower back. Later, when the shoulders finally do get fixed, which can take months, everything underneath has to shift all over again.

Think of a stack of boxes with the top one crooked. You don’t straighten the stack by yanking out the middle box. You fix it from the top. That’s the totem pole from Chapter 5.

Here’s a real example. Put your feet up on boxes during a bench press, the way Chapter 17 teaches, and your lower back and pelvis settle beautifully. But leave the shoulders rolled forward, and the front of the shoulder still gets pinched, rep after rep. The bottom got fixed. The top got left behind.

“It Started at My Feet”

A fair question: if flat floors and shoes started a lot of this, why not start at the feet?

Because where the damage started and where the fix has to start are two different questions. Try this: sit on a stool or a counter high enough that your feet dangle and can’t touch the floor. Your shoulders are still rounded. Your head is still forward. Your lower back is still arched, or still slumped, whichever way yours goes. Taking your feet off the ground changed nothing up top. The feet may be where it began. The leverage to fix it is still at the top.

The Source of the Source

You've probably heard "treat the source, not the symptom." It's good advice. The trouble is where people stop looking. Many stop at the pelvis and call it the source. But the pelvis is often just reacting to what's happening above it.

A master practitioner keeps asking: what caused *that*? They trace the chain back, layer by layer, sometimes to the source of the source of the source. That takes real knowledge and a trained eye, and it's the part of my work that happens in person.

Your job is simpler. You don't have to trace every link. You assemble the whole: set your Power Stance, from the top down, and let the body sort out the rest. The

practitioner traces the chain. You build the whole. Both work, and they work best together.

Which Came First Doesn’t Matter

Do rounded shoulders cause the pelvis to tip, or does the tipped pelvis pull the shoulders forward? It’s an interesting question, but it doesn’t change the fix. After years of layering one compensation on top of another, you can’t reach down and pull out the first block. You back out in reverse order, from the top. Fix the upper body correctly, and the lower body follows.

The Other View, Not the Wrong One

None of this makes anyone else's work worthless. Your doctor, your chiropractor, your therapist, and your trainer all know things I don't. This chapter is simply the view from where I stand, top down and whole body, after forty-five years of watching what actually changes when people get organized.

Many good practitioners already think this way. If yours does, you're in good hands.

Chapter 21 — Not Three Goals. One Practice.

Back to Page One

You picked up this book wanting three things: to be stronger, more flexible, and better balanced. Most people chase those in three different rooms, with three different instructors. Now you've seen why they don't have to be separate.

They Grow From the Same Roots

Look back at what you've learned. To stretch well, you used balance to set yourself up, and a gentle

squeeze of strength to ask for new length. To get stronger, you worked the muscle in its long, stretched range, the same range where flexibility is built. And your balance got better the moment your body stopped fighting itself.

Strength, flexibility, and balance aren’t three separate skills. They grow from the same roots: a body organized against gravity. The techniques change. The roots don’t.

That’s also why balance shows up almost on its own. You don’t chase it on a wobble board. When your body is organized and your strength and flexibility are built the right way, balance is what’s left standing.

Mind, Body, and Spirit Pay Each Other Back

It was never only your body. Remember the beam on the ladders. Fear took away balance you had a moment before. Remember the one stress account from Chapter 7. Worry, pain, and a slumped back all draw from the same place.

It works the other way too. A body that’s organized calms the mind. A calm mind lets the body let go. Each one pays the other back. That’s why I keep telling you not to force things. Forcing breaks the circle. Patience keeps it turning.

Everything Has a Price

I’ll be honest with you about one more thing. Nothing in the body is free. Every choice is a trade.

At the start, you’re a beginner, and the gains come fast, like I promised in Chapter 4. But the better you get, the smaller each new gain becomes, and the more the details matter. Working deeper and harder, even with good knowledge, still costs you something: more recovery, more care, more attention.

So effort, rest, and adapting have to be learned together. Push without rest, and you break down. Rest without effort, and nothing changes. Learn when to do which, and you move past flat, one-muscle-at-a-time training and past what most people ever reach.

Stop. Organize. Then Move.

If this book comes down to one habit, it's this one. Before you move, stop for a moment and organize yourself against gravity. Shoulder blades back and down. Core closed. Let the hip find the lean. Then move.

Not just in the gym. Reaching for a sock. Lifting a box. Getting out of bed. Sitting at your desk. Standing in line.

A lot of people think of the gym as the one place they get to turn their brain off. It's the opposite. It's the place where turning your brain off costs you the most. Nobody walks into a martial arts school and says they just want to

throw punches without thinking about technique. There's a belt system built around the idea that good structure has to be earned and practiced. I think training should work the same way. The person who holds real structure under a moderate weight is further along than the person moving a heavy weight with none.

I Still Catch Myself

I've done this for forty-five years, and I still catch myself slipping, a shoulder drifting forward, a habit sneaking back, a picture in my head that turns out to be too simple. That doesn't mean the method failed. It means the skill was never about being perfect.

It’s about noticing, and coming back.

That’s what I hope you take from this: not a perfect posture, but the habit of checking. Is my body organized for what I’m about to do? Ask it every time, and your body will answer.

Keep This Book Close

This isn’t a book you read once. The first time through gives you the map. Come back after a few months of practice, and you’ll see things you couldn’t see the first time, because now you’ve walked some of the ground.

Strength. Flexibility. Balance. You came here wanting three things to chase. You’re leaving with one

practice: organize yourself against gravity, on purpose, every time. Do that, and all three show up together, because that’s how they were built to work.

Now go back and read Page One again. It’ll read differently this time.

A Note on How This Book Was Written

I’m not a polished writer. I’m dyslexic. I spell things the way they sound, I make up words, and grammar has never made sense to me.

Growing up, that got me labeled the wrong way. I’d start a school year with good grades and watch them fall apart, and I’d get called lazy. I wasn’t. I just think slower than a classroom moves. I had more questions than the class had time for, and I couldn’t keep up once new material piled on before I’d finished the last.

That same slowness turned out to be my strength. I’m good at one

thing: gathering everything I can find on a subject, from every side, and sitting with it, sometimes for weeks, until I can see through the noise to my own answer. I've done that with the body for forty-five years. I did it with engines too, and it earned me a patent on a valve timing design, built from listening to two sides of an old argument until I understood why each was half right.

If you were ever called slow or lazy for reasons that weren't true, hear this from someone who lived it: the thing that got you in trouble as a kid might be the very thing that lets you see what others miss.

About the AI. I used an AI tool to help me write this book. It helped

with spelling, sentences, and saying things clearly. It didn't give me forty-five years of working on real bodies. That part I earned the hard way, through my own injuries, hundreds of clients, and a lot of trial and error. The AI helped me find the words. The knowledge is mine.

About what's proven and what's mine. When I'm sharing my own observation or idea rather than established science, I tell you so, right there. Some of those ideas may turn out wrong, and I'm at peace with that. That's how real thinking works.

About research. I lean on published research throughout this book, and I respect it. But science changes its mind as better

studies come along. That's science working the way it should. So I treat research as our best current understanding, not the final word, and I weigh it against what I've seen with my own hands.

Every observation in this book was made on a real body, over forty-five years. That's the only credential I'm claiming.

Working With Me

This book gives you the principles: what the Power Stance is, why it works, and how to start. That’s real, and you can use it on your own starting today.

What it doesn’t give you is the exact dose. How long to hold a position. How much effort to use, and when. How to let go so a tight muscle truly lengthens. How to build real strength at the end of your range without hurting yourself. Those details work, and they’ve taken me forty-five years to refine. But they aren’t one-size-fits-all. They depend on your body, your history, your injuries, and what you want. A book can

explain a medicine, but the dose has to be fitted to the person.

That's what I do when I work with someone, in person here in the Coachella Valley or online by video. My studio has equipment and setups you won't find in a regular gym, like the slant board, built over the years to help people find their Power Stance and hold it. If you want that, reach out. And if you'd like to see it for yourself first, or money is tight right now, come to one of my free group sessions. Everyone is welcome.

There's one more honest reason people train with me, and it has nothing to do with secrets. We're all human. Knowing what to do and doing it every day are two different things. Most of us do

better with someone watching: someone who catches the elbow drifting before we feel it, and who expects us back next week. Retraining your nervous system takes about four months of steady practice. My job is to keep you on it until it sticks.

And it does stick. Coaching matters most while the new way still feels unnatural. Once the pattern is wired into your nervous system, it becomes second nature, the same light-switch moment from Chapter 4. You stop needing someone to catch every rep. Your body starts running it on its own.

So there are really two programs here. The first one rewires your nervous system until good posture runs without you thinking about

it. That one has an end. The second one is your choice: some people go on alone from there, and some keep training because they know they push harder with someone in their corner. Both are fine. One fixes the wiring. The other is about how far you want to go.

Either way, keep this book close. Practice what's in it. It works.

How to Reach Me

Text or call: 760-408-6325 Like a lot of people, I don't answer numbers I don't recognize, because there are so many scam calls. So text me, or leave a voicemail (it comes to me as a

text), and tell me why you're reaching out. I'll get back to you.

Email: posture101@yahoo.com
Website: Posture-101.com

Free group sessions: I keep these small and local, and I set the times around the people who want to come. Reach out, tell me you're interested, and I'll let you know when the next one is.

Find It By What Hurts

- **Neck pain, tension, headaches, head forward:** Ch 10 (Tech Neck), Ch 19 (The Neck and Upper Back; When the Head Goes Its Own Way)
- **Upper back and shoulders that always want a massage:** Ch 19, Ch 9 (The Grocery Bag Test)
- **Shoulder pain, rotator cuff:** Ch 11 (Injury Changes the Rules; The Coffee Cup), Ch 17 (The Chest Press; The Shoulder Fails Quietly)
- **Lower back pain, back "went out":** Ch 5 (Your True

Core), Ch 9 (The Sock Story; Getting Up), Ch 1

- **Sit-ups, crunches, training your abs:** Ch 18
- **Just starting out, what to expect:** Ch 4 (Three Things I Tell Every New Client)
- **Pain getting out of bed, off the floor, off the couch:** Ch 6 (The Gateway), Ch 9 (Getting Up)
- **Hip and pelvis confusion:** Ch 3 (Step 4), Ch 20 (Starting at the Bottom)
- **Knee pain, knees caving in:** Ch 15 (The Small Muscle Behind Your Knee), Ch 17 (Leg Curls and Leg Extensions), Ch 19 (Knees That Cave In), Ch 13 (Getting There Safely)

- **IT band tightness:** Ch 19 (Knees That Cave In; The Foam Roller Is a Signal)
- **Feet, arches, bunions, heels:** Ch 15, Ch 11 (When Something Is Already Worn)
- **Shin splints:** Ch 15 (Two Ways to Take a Step)
- **Poor balance, fear of falling:** Ch 14, Ch 7 (The Beam)
- **Tight hamstrings, stretching that doesn't work:** Ch 12, Ch 13
- **Sitting all day, desk and car:** Ch 10
- **Trouble breathing deeply:** Ch 10 (Breathing)
- **Poor sleep, waking up stiff:** Ch 10 (The Last Decisions

Before Sleep)

- **Bone spurs, worn joints:** Ch 11 (When Something Is Already Worn)
- **Pain at the gym:** Ch 16, Ch 17, Ch 8 (The Pop Off Valve)
- **Injured and healing:** Ch 11

Key Terms

- **Power Stance:** Your body organized against gravity: shoulder blades back and down, core closed, and a slight lean from the hip socket, all at once. (Ch 2, 3)
- **Middle zone:** The range between your shoulders fully forward and fully back, where your Power Stance lives. (Ch 3)
- **Femoral hip socket:** The ball-and-socket joint where your thigh bone meets your pelvis. The Power Stance lean comes from here. (Ch 3)
- **Dipping bird:** Tipping your upper body forward as one piece from the hip socket,

without bending your spine. (Ch 3)

- **Tensegrity:** Strength through balanced tension. Bones push, muscles and connective tissue pull. (Ch 2, 5)
- **Three states:** Active (real load), Transitional (ordinary movement), and Restorative (true rest). (Ch 6)
- **The gateway:** The moment you leave rest and start moving. (Ch 6)
- **Tool and technique:** The Power Stance is a tool that runs on its own once learned. A technique is something you choose and control the whole time. (Ch 6)
- **Pop off valve:** Your closed core letting go on its own

when a load reaches your limit. (Ch 8)

- **Ping Pong Effect:** Bouncing between the new, correct pattern and the old one while you're learning. (Ch 4)
- **Posture muscles and work muscles:** Muscles built for all-day endurance versus muscles built for short, strong effort. (Ch 4)
- **Quick flip and dimmer switch:** A Power Stance switched on for an instant, versus one held and turned up or down to match the load. (Ch 9)
- **Kata:** A movement practiced in its full, perfect form until your body knows it. (Ch 14)

- **Land, give, push:** What a healthy foot does on every step. (Ch 15)
- **Backing into a stretch:** Finding your limit from a low, compact start, then setting up support and letting go. (Ch 12)
- **Slant board:** A padded, tilting board that holds you in a supported stretch. (Ch 12)
- **Potty squat:** A deep, relaxed resting squat, heels down and back rounded. (Ch 13)
- **Shorten first:** Putting a stretched-out muscle back into a relaxed, shortened position before working on it. (Ch 19)
- **Lengthened vs. stretched:** Lengthened means the

muscle holds itself long and keeps working. Stretched means it lets go and something else pulls it long. (Ch 18)

- **Dead man’s hang:** Hanging limp, with nothing working and the body hanging off its joints. (Ch 18)
- **Popliteus:** The small muscle behind your knee that unlocks it so it can bend. (Ch 15, 17)