

# POSTURAL ASSESSMENT

JANE  
JOHNSON

HANDS-ON GUIDES  
FOR THERAPISTS



An illustrated  
guide of 79  
steps

# Postural Assessment

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Hands-On Guides for Therapists



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**Jane Johnson, MCSP, MSc**  
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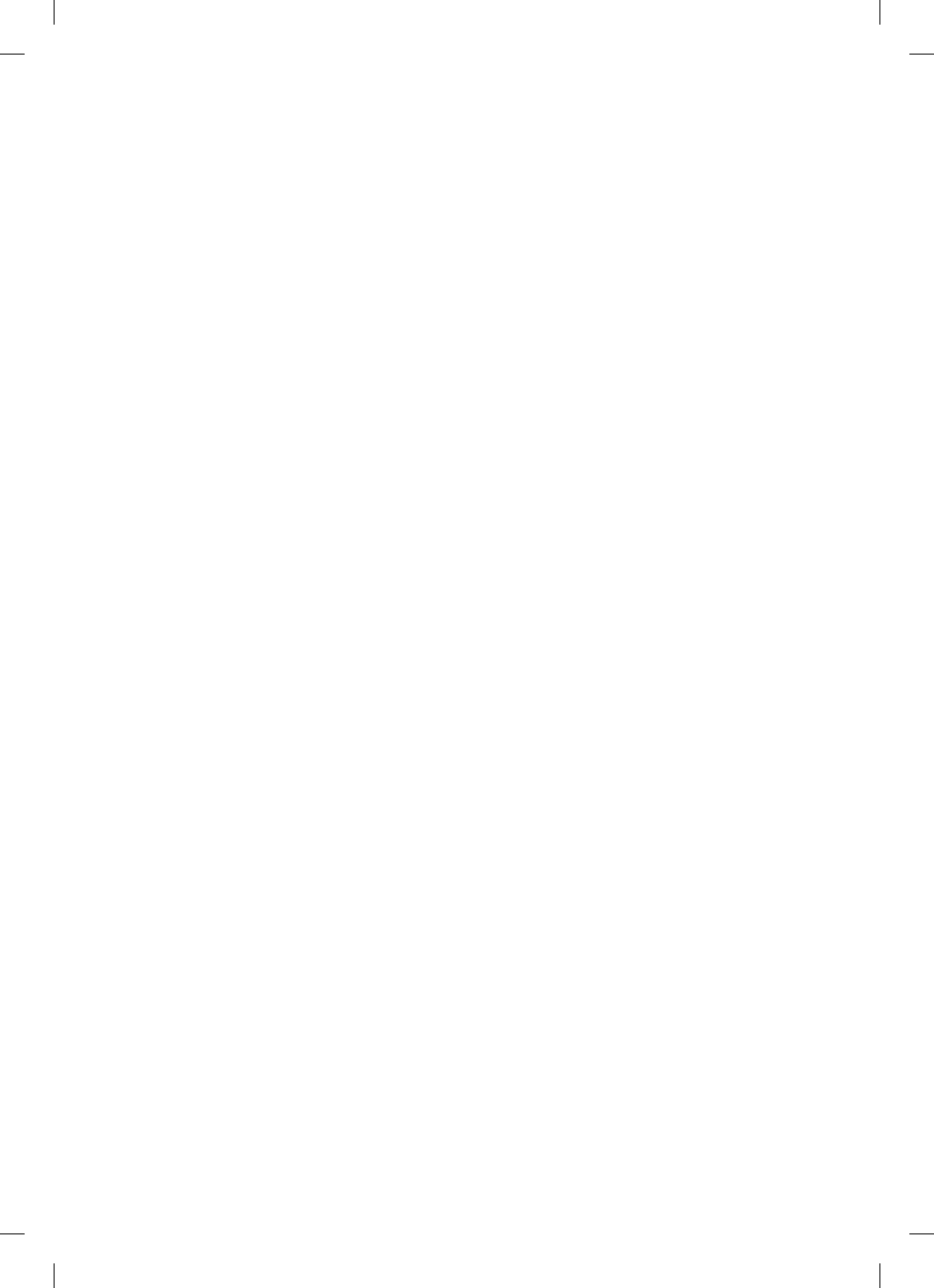
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I dedicate this book to two groups of people. First, to the many hundreds of bodyworkers who have attended my postural assessment workshops. Thank you for standing in your underwear so that we may all learn more about posture and the similarities and differences among our bodies. Thank you also for your questions, which have kept me on my toes and interested in this subject for many years. Second, I dedicate this book to all of you who are new to postural assessment and for whom I have two pieces of advice: You have to start somewhere, and you don't have to agree.





# Series Preface

Massage may be one of the oldest therapies still used today. At present more therapists than ever before are practicing an ever-expanding range of massage techniques. Many of these techniques are taught through massage schools and within degree courses. Our need now is to provide the best clinical and educational resources that will enable massage therapists to learn the required techniques for delivering massage therapy to clients. Human Kinetics has developed the Hands-On Guides for Therapists series with this in mind.

The Hands-On Guides for Therapists series provides specific tools of assessment and treatment that fall well within the realm of massage therapists but may also be useful for other bodyworkers, such as osteopaths and fitness instructors. Each book in the series is a step-by-step guide to delivering the techniques to clients. Each book features a full-colour interior packed with photos illustrating every technique. Tips provide handy advice to help you adjust your technique, and the Client Talk boxes contain examples of how the techniques can be used with clients who have particular problems. Throughout each book are questions that enable you to test your knowledge and skill, which will be particularly helpful if you are attempting to pass a qualification exam. We've even provided the answers too!

You might be using a book from the Hands-On Guides for Therapists series to obtain the required skills to help you pass a course or to brush up on skills you learned in the past. You might be a course tutor looking for ways to make massage therapy come alive with your students. This series provides easy-to-follow steps that will make the transition from theory to practice seem effortless. The Hands-On Guides for Therapists series is an essential resource for all those who are serious about massage therapy.



# Preface

Whether you are a student or practitioner of physical therapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, sports massage, sports therapy or almost any form of bodywork, including fitness instruction, yoga and Pilates, you will no doubt appreciate the value in carrying out postural assessments as part of your overall assessment procedure. The assessment of posture helps you to determine whether there is any muscular or fascial imbalance and whether this imbalance might be contributing to a client's pain or dysfunction.

Being able to assess posture for imbalance is a skill required by most therapists, yet until now, there have been few resources to support practitioners in this task. *Postural Assessment* is intended as a comprehensive, user-friendly guide to this topic, with tips that will enable you to perform your observations in a confident and competent manner. This book focuses on what posture reveals about the relationships among various body parts so that you may be better informed about whether such relationships are causing or contributing to pain or discomfort or whether these relationships might affect the stability of joints by increasing or decreasing joint range. The emphasis is on the assessment of static posture in standing and seated positions. Written for complete beginners in the use of postural assessment as an examination tool, this book will generate ideas about what to look for, how to identify common postural forms and how to make sense of your observations.

*Postural Assessment* is organised into two parts. Part I explains how to get started and answers questions such as these: Why perform postural assessment? Who should have postural assessment? Where and when should postural assessment take place? What are the benefits of doing postural assessment? In this introduction you will learn about factors affecting posture and the ideal posture as well as how to provide the correct environment for postural assessment, what equipment you will need, how long it should take and how and why to document your findings. Line drawings illustrate the bony landmarks you will be using as you work through later chapters.

Part II contains the nuts and bolts of postural assessment—where you start and what you look for. Arranged according to whether you are observing your client from the back, side, front or in a seated position, each of the chapters in this part of the book follows the same format: A part of the body is presented with a line drawing and a short description of how to assess that body part, followed by a paragraph explaining what your findings mean. For example, what does it mean that your client has inwardly rotated shoulders—which muscles are short and tight, and which are long and weak? The What Your Findings Mean sections explain what various postures suggest about underlying musculature; they will help you relate your observations to real-life clients.

Notice that throughout chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 (the chapters that make up part II), I refer to what each posture suggests, might mean, indicates, may mean or could mean. This is because I have chosen to analyze posture based on traditional assumptions regarding how muscles work. As a practitioner myself, I have inevitably weighted some suggestions more than others, based on my own experiences. It seemed helpful to include these sections to provide a starting point from which to develop your own ideas. In my experience, bodyworkers are markedly varied in their approaches to both the assessment and treatment of clients, and so you may not agree with my comments in these sections. Many steps offer quick tests you can do to justify these statements. I openly encourage you to question what your findings mean and ask how you could confirm for yourself, for example, that a person standing with protracted scapulae may have lengthened and weakened rhomboids and shorter anterior chest muscles. Perhaps more important, nowhere do I state what you should or could do to correct posture. This book is about what you observe, not what you do with your findings.

Putting together this text on postural assessment has been an interesting process. I was trained by educators who upheld a traditional view of musculoskeletal anatomy and physiology, and I have therefore held that knowledge at the core of my practice. However, it pays to keep an open mind and to be alert to progress in the fields of anatomy and physiology, perhaps even to question traditional assumptions about the way individual muscles work. I encourage you to seek out information to support your own conclusions regarding postural assessment. For example, in their article 'Anatomy and Actions of the Trapezius Muscle', Johnson, Bogduk, Nowitzke, and House (1994) carried out a study that 'refutes misconceptions about the actions of trapezius and how they are conventionally depicted' (p. 44). In another more recent article in a series on the psoas muscle, Thomas Myers (2001) questions whether the psoas is a hip flexor and whether this muscle contributes to thoracolumbar rotation.

The appendix contains a full set of charts for documenting your findings. These charts provide space for you to write your observations as you work through each step of postural assessment, whether you are observing your client from the front, side, back or in a standing or seated position.

As with other titles in the Hands-On Guides for Therapists series, the step-by-step format is supported throughout with tips to get you up to speed with the assessment technique. There are also Quick Questions at the end of each chapter so you can test yourself as you proceed. Unlike other titles in the series, *Postural Assessment* uses predominantly simple line drawings rather than photographs to facilitate identifying anatomical relationships.

As therapists, we are encouraged to work holistically with our clients, linking one body part with another and appreciating how body systems interrelate. Yet when attempting to process a new skill, we can sometimes feel overwhelmed trying to assimilate all the information. I am therefore hoping you will forgive me for compartmentalising the body and its assessment in the presentation of this book. Here, assessment procedures are presented in bite-sized chunks to give you time to process the information. Whatever your profession, if you are involved with helping people to look after and feel better in their bodies, I hope you will find this book of value.

# Acknowledgements

Initial thanks must go to John Dickinson, former acquisitions editor at Human Kinetics, for believing my idea for a book on postural assessment had merit. Thanks also to Loarn Robertson for also liking the idea and accepting the formal proposal.

I am indebted to the many subjects who volunteered to be photographed for this book, including those whose images did not appear in the final version. As you may realise, one has to select material from a large number of photographs, and without these to choose from, this book would not have been possible. To everyone who hung around in their underwear that long evening in London, I thank you for your generosity.

I would like to give special thanks to Bruce and Patricia Robertson, my parents, whose photographs demonstrate the effects of postural change with increasing years. Also, to Siva Rajah, who agreed to having her photograph taken at very short notice, and to Tatina Semprini, for helping so much on the day of the photography shoot. Thanks to the photographer, Emma Kelly, who executed the photography shoot with diligence and humor, following my specifications to the letter. I hope your job as a police officer will not prevent us from working together again.

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