

Finding your balance

Whatever else optimal body usage might be, it's got something to do with *balance*. Balance can seem complicated, but we need just two things to explore it: some good ideas to help us *understand* how it works and the desire to *feel* whatever is happening.

How we balance has consequences that are more black-and-white than we might imagine. For example, if we stand and let our weight go into our heels, the feeling is that we *sink* into them: there's a heavy, "down" feeling. If, however, we stand on the *whole* foot—balancing like a tripod on the heel, the ball of the foot and just behind the little toe—we automatically *rise*, lifted by the support of the foot. (This feeling is completely different from trying to *pull* or *hold* ourselves up.)

This principle doesn't apply just to the foot, but to each part of the body. Each segment can either be poised lightly on the segment below, or it can be falling off that segment into a heavier, more compressed alignment. We can learn a lot by simply noticing, segment by segment, which one is happening. (The *directions* in which our segments fall, wherever we're not poised, begin to describe our overall pattern of alignment.)

One good way to investigate this is simply to stand and shift your weight back and forward, using the ankle as the primary hinge. You may notice how, as weight moves from back to front, that there's a small 'up-and-over' feeling. In other words, the body starts out with its weight down and back, rises as the weight shifts forward, and then settles slightly as the weight gets to the front of the foot. Once you've got that, you might ask: are there parts of my body that *don't* make this down-up-down arc in the movement? Those parts are likely to be having a hard time finding balance in your pattern. (Next, try feeling what happens as you shift left and right; the same rules apply.)

Gathering this information and making use of it can feel complicated and subtle, but there's a big potential payoff. Most of us have unconsciously picked up habits of imbalance and compression that aren't serving us well, and have been struggling to cope with their consequences. Beginning to *feel* the habits and *understand* something about how they work is a big step towards improvement.