

# Postural Therapy and the Egoscue Method

## *People Usually Sit Up Straight When I Start Talking*

by Ann-Margaret Giovino

### My Journey to Postural Therapy Work

In 2000, I opened Gym Giovino. As a trainer, I noticed that if a person had asymmetrical form while lifting weights, he or she couldn't make strength gains. In other cases, despite my hawk-eye for monitoring and coaching good form, people would experience reoccurrences of old injuries. What I didn't know then was that you could correct form until the cows come home, but the root cause was postural misalignment, which weight training could never fix.

I was introduced to the Egoscue Method by an acupuncturist in Florida, then reintroduced to it by a colleague here in Ann Arbor. The second time was a charm; I paid attention to this message. I read two of Pete Egoscue's books (*Pain Free: A Revolutionary Method for Stopping Chronic Pain* and *The Egoscue Method of Health Through Motion*). It made perfect sense and this is what I had been looking for.

The Egoscue Method is an exercise-based, pain-relief, posture-aligning modality. It uses gentle exercises to correct postural misalignments and reintroduce proper body mechanics. By performing a daily routine, a client takes personal responsibility on his or her road to recovery. As a postural alignment therapist, I am able to analyze a person's posture and customize the routine to a client's particular situation.

I got certified as a Postural Alignment Specialist in 2007. The massage therapist, the chiropractor, and the other personal trainer in my class had difficulties wrapping their heads around the principles and methodology. They were mapping their previous training onto this new method. Hearing their struggle helped me realize it was advantageous to forget what I had learned and be open to a new way of thinking. When a person is in pain, we need to look at the body as a unit instead of focusing on the part or parts that hurt. Pain can be the result of posture that is out of balance, front to back and side to side. When in pain we, as individuals, can be active participants in healing ourselves rather than having to be fixed by someone else. These were important lessons I brought back to Ann Arbor, starting my practice anew.



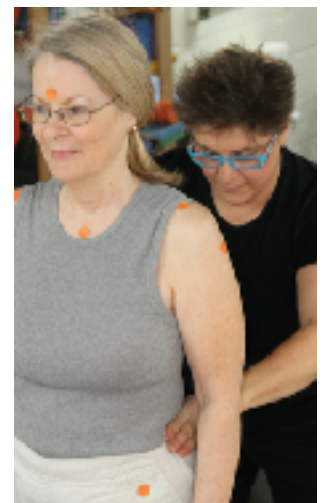
### The Anatomy of a Session

The best way to communicate postural misalignment is through visual aids. To do this, I place sticky dots on the body at each of the load-bearing joints (ankle, knee, hip, and shoulder). Taking photos — front, back, and side views — allows me to add vertical and horizontal lines connecting the dots. And there

you have it — the first step toward postural awareness. When people have this visual, they experience an “a-ha” moment: *No wonder why I'm in pain. How did I get this way?*

Changes in our environment and lifestyle take place gradually and often go unnoticed. If you are old enough to remember, think about when there were no such things as garage door openers or TV remote controls. You had to get up to change the channel or get out of the car and open the garage door. Let's take away many more layers of modern conveniences to a time when you had to build the fire to cook the food you grew in a garden or actively hunted. You collected the wood to build the fire, to make the tool, to cut the wood, to build the house. Technology takes away body movement. The less the body is asked to move, and the less our environment demands of us physically, the more restricted our movement becomes. This is a major cause of postural problems and pain.

In a session I ask a client to do functional tests to analyze his or her movement. Walking, for instance, shows me where energy gets stuck and how a person compensates in order to get the job done. This gives me clues as to which of the 600-plus exercises I should have the client try. I say “try” because this is a partnership; the client knows best what he or she can do, and gives



me feedback on the effects of a particular exercise. Even a nondescript “*I don’t know, but I feel different*” is enough to know we’re on the right track. And if we’re not, we try something else until there’s a positive change.

Get this: the sight of the pain is not always the sight of the problem! A client could present with neck pain, or tinnitus, or plantar fasciitis, or bunions, and for any of those issues, my main focus is leveling the pelvis. One hip may be higher, or torqued or tilted, or all three. If so, it affects what goes up (spine, head, arm, hand) and what goes down (leg, ankle, feet, toes). You may think, *Oh, I’ll “hold” my pelvis in place*, but actually, posturally, it’s the muscles that tell the bones what to do, not your brain. And if the muscles on one side of the body are tight or strong and the corresponding muscles on the other side are loose or weak, then the bones will twist or tilt or elevate, and you can’t think your way out of it. We need to even out the musculature, which evens out the bones, which evens out the posture, which eliminates the pain. This is done through personalized, therapeutic exercise.



*Photos by Joni Strickfaden*

Athletes are especially good at hiding or compensating for postural dysfunctions. What do you think would happen if those were cleared? My goodness, huge gains in speed, flexibility, and strength.

So back to the session — after the movement tests, I give the client a few exercises, finding the ones that change posture for the better and work to alleviate pain. Every possible restriction can be accommodated. If you can’t get up and down off the floor, no problem; you can try seated exercises, or use the massage table, bringing the floor to you. If you can’t kneel or your wrists hurt under pressure, I have work-arounds. It’s important that a person isn’t in pain during the exercises. We try different ones until we find a grouping that meets

the goals of the session, constantly re-checking posture — have we released the pelvic twist, softened the excessive lumbar curve, reduced the forward head position, or alleviated a compensation in the client’s gait?

## Great and Not Uncommon Results

One client experienced huge changes after the first few exercises of the first session. This tall, slight, soft-spoken woman raised her fists as if she suddenly possessed a sense of “fight.” She felt like she could take on the world. She hadn’t done bench presses or squats; she did gentle floor work and targeted isometrics. Good posture is strengthening. The better your posture, the stronger you feel. Strength training built on good postural alignment can dramatically increase strength.

Yet another client, after doing three simple lie-down exercises, said, “That did more for my back problems than seven months of physical therapy.” Others have told me how deep and emotional this work is for them, and some describe it as an “easy-looking” workout that actually kicks their butt. The experience is different for each person, with pain relief and increased functionality being the common thread.

## Helping People

A long, long time ago when asked in an interview what I wanted to do exactly, I answered with a cliché “I want to help people.” But it was true! I just didn’t know how, then, and I do now. Be still my heart when a client hugs me because their pain is gone for the first time, or when their journey up the flight of stairs from my gym to the first floor is easier and doable and surprising. As they leave, I smile.

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*Ann-Margaret Giovino is the owner and operator of Gym Giovino, a private gym in Ann Arbor ([www.gymgiovino.com](http://www.gymgiovino.com)). She is a certified postural alignment specialist specializing in pain reduction and body mechanics. Additionally she offers and teaches the Raindrop Technique, a therapeutic massage that uses essential oils to alleviate spinal conditions. She is also becoming a Tai Chi Master and teaching beginning students the Basic Form ([sunshen.org/basicform](http://sunshen.org/basicform)), where she combines her posture work with traditional Tai Chi principles and practices. She can be contacted at (734) 276-7769.*