

# ***Staying Flexible***

*The Key to Pain-Free Living*

***Ann-Marie Hope Vaccaro, P.T.***



*I have run for fitness for many years and in the last two years I have begun to run the half marathon. Last year during training my right hip and ankle were in so much pain that I could barely continue. I went to Ann-Marie for help. She lined up my hips and taught me how to keep myself in line through the techniques in this book. The exercises are simple and straightforward and they had an immediate, positive effect on my running. This year I have integrated these techniques into my regular routine. After each training run I use the therapy ball and stretches and I am training completely pain-free. My exercise routine is so much more effective as I feel it actually adjusts my spine and keeps me aligned. I recommend "Staying Flexible" to anyone who deals with back or hip pain as part of their daily life.*

**Adele Bovard**  
**Superintendent, Webster Schools, Rochester, NY**

*Because I am constantly on the road with lots of flights and different hotel beds, I often developed very bothersome, lower back pain. Ann-Marie's treatments have addressed and corrected the pain every time; sometimes with immediate results. And when I have followed the exercises she has given me, the problems have gone away on their own. Since she first treated me several years ago, even after intense travel for weeks, my back has been consistently better. I heartily recommend her!*

**Dr. Michael L. Brown**  
**Professor, Author & Itinerant Speaker, Charlotte, NC**

*For forty years my body had compensated for a misaligned pelvis resulting from a fall as a child. After having tried conventional medical approaches as well as chiropractic to no avail, I was finally helped by Ann-Marie. Through her trained eyes and hands she was able to recognize and correct my problem, setting me on a road to relief from pain!*

**Dr. Ruth Kempf**  
**Physics Professor, NC**

*After consistently incorporating the stretches and the techniques that Ann-Marie taught me, I began to feel less pain in my lower back and my posture began to improve. The main thing I noticed was that when I stay consistent with the stretches and techniques, my flexibility and back health overall improves.*

**Michael Lubanovic**  
**Pastor/Teacher, Concord, NC**



*With the touch of a master, Ann-Marie's physical therapy helps you to feel normal again and teaches you how to take care of the critical parts of your structure. You feel like you have regained years of youth.*

**M. John Cava**  
**Director, World Outreach Center, Ft. Mills, SC**

*I suffered from chronic knee pain for the past ten to fifteen years. After treatment, I was re-aligned and have ceased to suffer from this ailment. I have been pain-free for over a year now thanks to the Manual Therapy I received from Ann-Marie.*

**Lauren Davis**  
**Teacher, Huntersville, NC**

*As a result of my scoliosis and whiplash injury, I have been in and out of physical therapy many times. Standard physical therapy is always the same: stimulation, heat, exercise and ice; the usual band-aid administered. Ann-Marie is far above the run of the mill therapist. Her non-conventional, hands-on techniques focus on releasing healing and soothing problematic areas with professional therapeutic massage, pressure and/or stretching. Patient comfort and successful maintenance are her priorities and the results are wonderful: comfort, mobility and less medication, plus empowerment to self-treat and maintain, resulting in finally, a pain-free existence. She has even designed equipment for other specific problem resolutions.*

**Catherine Matuzza**  
**Tax Accountant, Long Island, NY**

*I tried several remedies and treatments over many years after my four car accidents. I was determined to find out WHY I was in such excruciating head, neck, shoulder, back and butt pain. I had tried chiropractic, physical therapy, neurology, medicines and injections over a period of eight years with no results. They always told me that nothing was wrong with me and everything was fine. One day I went to my doctor, once again trying to find some lasting relief of all my pain. I felt hopeless and I was still in excruciating pain. He referred me to Ann-Marie. Immediately I was impressed. Someone actually understood and cared that I was in pain, and wanted to help me. After the first treatment, I had less pain in my head and was able to bend over without pain, something I had not done in eight years. It has continued to get better and better with continued treatment and I feel like I'm twenty again!*

**Veronica Rizzo**  
**Homemaker, North Babylon, NY**



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I am writing this for YOU.

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. God made no mistake when He created you, but rather put into flesh His brilliance and creativity. You are beautiful; an awesome creation of the King.

I want to share with you what has taken over twenty years of working with people's bodies to understand. There are certain principles that we need to be aware of as we go through life so that we will take care of our vessels. I am going to be talking primarily about spinal flexibility.

There was an adage once that went something like this:

**“You are as young as your spine is flexible.”**

I can tell you that is a very true statement! Spinal flexibility is the key to both staying healthy and looking our best.

What do I mean by spinal flexibility? I mean keeping your body (particularly your spine) free to be able to move in all the ways it was created to move, and not to “tighten down” or “hunker over” as we age. There is no need for that, but we need to understand certain things before we can cooperate with the laws of gravity that affect us all.

I think everyone realizes that “gravity” is continually exerting a downward pull. If my head, for instance, is forward of midline, (which is a pretty common occurrence) then gravity is exerting a force further pulling it into a forward position.

If, on the other hand, the head is balanced on top of the spine, then gravity will not affect it in this way. It will remain balanced. This means that the muscles of your neck and upper back will be working as they were created to, contracting only to make an adjustment or turn your head. When the head is forward of midline, not only is the spine curved more than it should be but the muscles of the neck and upper back are working overtime just to hold your head up!





My intent is to educate you; to give you practical ways to keep your body properly aligned and as flexible as it was meant to be. Have you noticed that it seems like the whole world is running to alternate therapies to help them reduce stress and relieve pain? I am all for this and there are many practitioners doing awesome work. What I would like to accomplish is to take it a step further.

Here is my premise:

**Why not take care of the problem at its source. If we do this, everything else will fall into place and be a wonderful addition.**

Massage of tight and sore back muscles will never solve the problem unless the whole body and its balance are taken into account. (Please don't get me wrong. There are talented, trained massage therapists addressing this very issue, daily.) However, we are a whole body. When one part is "suffering" the whole body suffers. In order to address the problem of tight and sore back muscles, let me first explain the fascial system.

Fascia (fash-a), is the connective tissue of your body. If I peeled off your skin, you would still look the same. Your body would have the same shape. Why? Because the fascia holds it. It's the stuff that weaves everything together. It actually permeates every muscle fiber, is around every organ of the body, even down to the actual cells that make up our muscles!

It is great stuff, like the white sinewy substance you find on an uncooked chicken leg. It has the capability of shortening (adapting to our body's habitual position) or lengthening. So practically speaking, if we slouch as a way of life, the fascia (not to mention the muscles) across the front part of our chest and neck tends to shorten.

So we say, "Stand up straight!" And we pull our necks back and square our shoulders. However, in less than thirty seconds, we're slouching again. Why? Because the fascia and muscles across our chest and neck have shortened and we are fighting the "pull" of them to stand straight those few seconds. This is no small pull we are fighting. It actually is two thousand pounds per square inch. Did you know that's the weight of a water buffalo? Ever feel like one is sitting on your chest? This is the problem. If the fascia and muscles of your chest have shortened through slouching for so many years, you actually can't stand up straight for more than a few seconds.



They will soon pull your shoulders over again and your upper body will resume its slightly rounded position. This leaves your poor back and neck muscles over-stretched and having to fire (contract or pull) continually in order to hold you and your head up.

Can you imagine, then, deciding to go to the gym to work out? Your back muscles are already over-stretched and tight. Your shoulders are forward of midline. You are trying to strengthen them without restoring them to their proper length. You're trying to strengthen muscles that are at best adapting – and far from their optimum working position!

This doesn't make good sense. I believe this is part of the reason we are seeing so many shoulder problems afflicting men, especially. They begin to strengthen without paying any attention to whether the body is in proper alignment. This is one example among many of the problems that arise when we try to tackle only a part of the problem instead of pursuing the holistic approach of flexibility and proper alignment

It's best at this point, if you are serious about helping yourself, to purchase an exercise ball at any sports shop or Walmart, Target or Modells (55 cm diameter if you are 5'5" or shorter; 65 cm diameter if 5'6" and over).

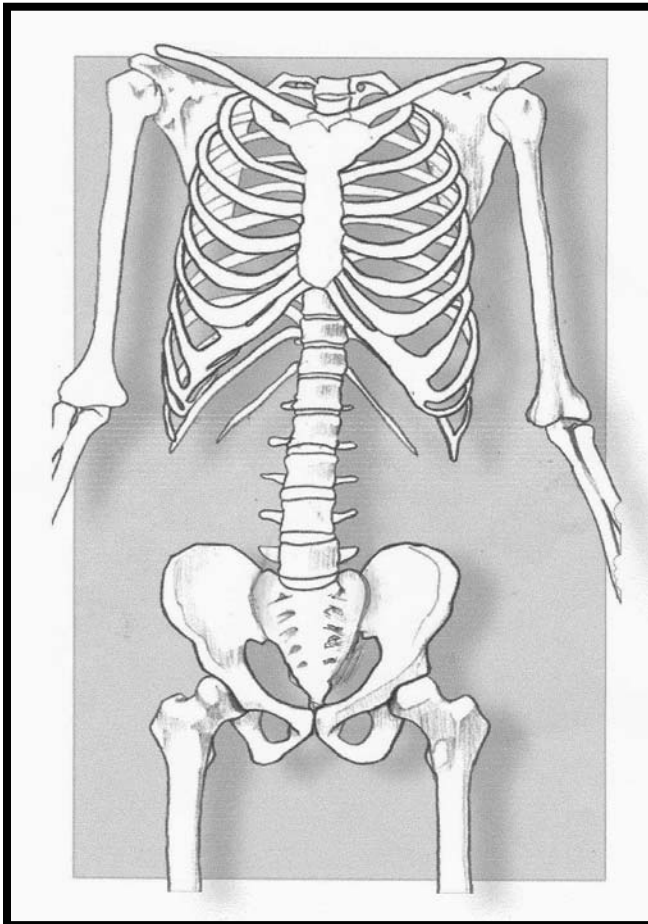
If you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, it is best to consult with your physician before initiating any of the following exercises and stretches.



# 1. Your Foundation

1.1

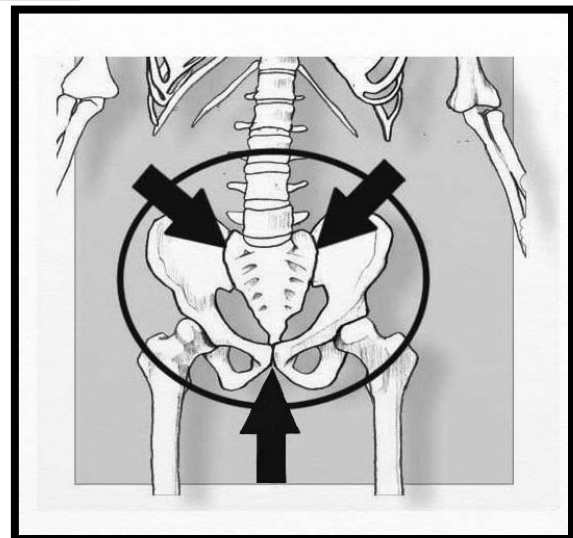
In order to know how you can help yourself, it's very important that you understand what you look like on the inside.



I want to show you your “skeleton.” Notice where the bones are in relation to one another. If they are not in their proper relationship, how can the muscles and other parts of the body that attach to these bones work correctly?

Your center of gravity is located in your pelvis. (See diagram below.) Notice your legs fit into your pelvic bones. Can you see that your pelvis (hips) consists of two separate bones? They join to each other in the front (indicated by the bottom arrow), and in the back they join into the tailbone on either side (indicated by the other two arrows).

This tailbone (“sacrum” in medical language, pronounced “say-crumb”) is the end of our spine. It actually is the last five vertebrae of the spine fused together into one bone with a small little bone at the very end call the coccyx, pronounced “cock – six.” (In this manual the “tailbone” will refer to the whole of the sacrum and coccyx combined.)

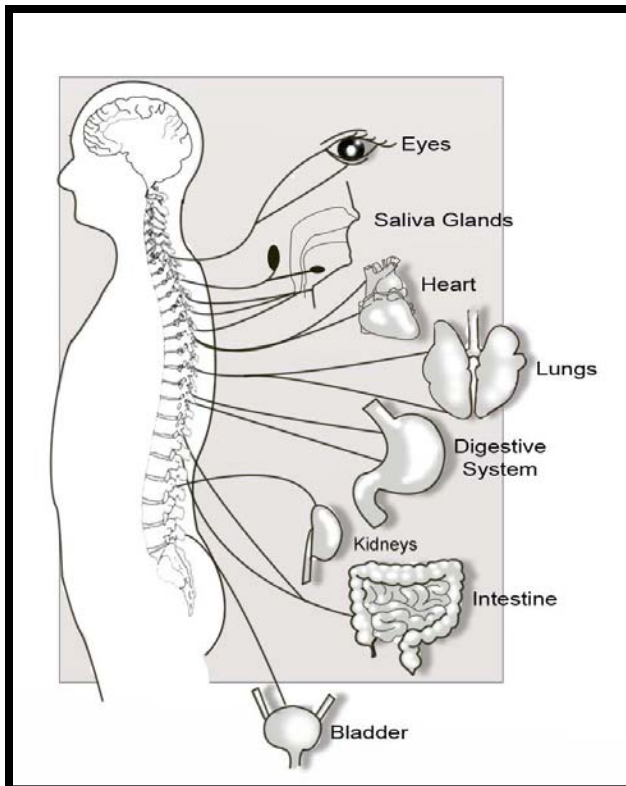
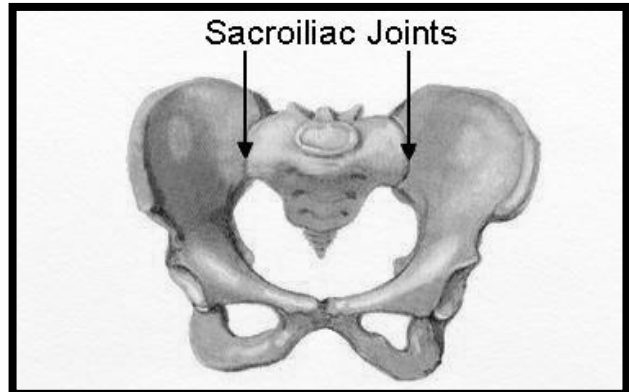




The two places in the back where the tailbone is joined to the pelvic bones are called the **sacroiliac joints** or S.I. joints.

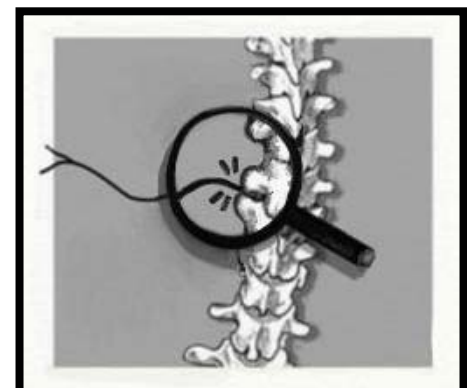
Sometimes we hear this term, sacroiliac, being thrown around without understanding to what it is referring. “Sacro” refers to sacrum and iliac refers to the ilium (name of the hip bone). So

the sacroiliac joint is the joint between the tailbone (sacrum) and the hip (ilium). The arrows in the drawing point to these joints.



The rest of the spine is built upwards from this tailbone, vertebra by vertebra. Your spine consists of twenty-four of these building blocks. Each vertebra has between it and the next one a disc consisting of gelatinous material that cushions one vertebra on the other and gives the spine the capability of movement as well as strength. Out from the sides of these vertebrae, there are spaces where the spinal nerves can come off the spine and go to various organs, like lungs, liver, heart, and yes, also to your muscles.

Can you see why it is SO IMPORTANT to have a spine that lines up, with good flexibility...so that all these nerves have plenty of space and are not “impinged” (pinched)? In the picture on the right, it’s the curvature of the spine which is causing the highlighted nerve to be pinched.





Chiropractors well understand this principle and take care of health issues by keeping the spine un-locked.

Your head was designed to balance on the top of the spine (and not in the all too familiar forward position). It is an awesome design!





**Note: To effectively and thoroughly address the following symptoms the foundational issues of pelvic leveling must first be resolved. (See Chapters 4 and 9)**

**1) Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:**

Chapter 4 – What Can You Do About It  
Chapter 6 – Keeping Your Spine flexible  
Chapter 12 – Your Very Tight Neck  
Chapter 14 – Dealing With Tight Wrists And Knees

**2) Headaches:**

Chapter 10 – Dealing With Knots  
Chapter 11 – Undoing Your Own Knots  
Chapter 9.7 – Cranial Base Release

**3) Jaw Pain:**

Chapter 4 – What Can You Do About It  
Chapter 12 – Your Very Tight Neck  
Chapter 13 – Your Jaw  
Chapter 18 – Case Study: Severe Jaw Problems

**4) Knee Pain:**

Chapter 14 – Dealing With Tight Wrists And Knees  
Chapter 17 – Case Study: Knee Pain

**5) Knots:**

Chapter 10 – Dealing With Knots  
Chapter 11 – Undoing Your Own Knots

**6) Lower Back Pain:**

Chapter 4 – What You Can Do About It  
Chapter 6 – Keeping Your Spine Flexible

**7) Neck Pain:**

Chapter 4 – What Can You Do About It  
Chapter 6 – Keeping Your Spine Flexible  
Chapter 12 – Your Very Tight Neck

**8) Pulled Muscle Pain:**

Chapter 19 – Case Study: Pulled Muscle From Workout

**9) Slouching:**

Chapter 15 – Sitting Proper Is So Important

**10) Sleeping:**

Chapter 16 – How Should I Sleep?

**11) Wrist Pain:**

Chapter 14 – Dealing With Tight Wrists And Knees