Sit up straight, it can boost your confidence

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Wear clean underwear, brush your teeth, say please and thank you—and sit up straight. Once again, it turns out that mom may have science on her side when it comes to doling out advice. In addition to the benefits to your muscles and spine, good posture can also help boost your confidence, according to psychologists Richard Petty and Benjamin Wagner at Ohio State and Pablo Brinol at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. In a study of 71 undergrads at Ohio State who were told to jot down their qualifications for a potential job opportunity, those who were instructed to sit up straight were far more likely to believe in their own merits, compared with those who slouched over their desks.

The students recruited for the research were told that they were participating in a two studies simultaneously, one of which was to determine how well people could hold a certain posture while also completing other tasks, and the other was to analyze how certain traits impact eligibility for success in business. Upon entering the room, they were seated in front of a computer, where they were either instructed to sit up straight and stick out their chests, or hunch over and direct their gazes toward their knees. In these positions, they then had to list positive or negative characteristics about themselves that could impact their future success in business.

After this exercise was completed, the students were polled about how well they thought they would fare in the business world, and how accurate their earlier descriptions of their own merits and faults had been. The results were dramatically different: those students who had hunched over while writing were almost universally less confident in their earlier answers compared with the group that had been sitting upright.

"With a confident body posture," the researchers conclude, "participants seemed to rely on their thoughts in forming their self-attitudes, but with a doubtful posture, participants did not use their thoughts to judge their promise as job candidates." In other words, whether or not they realized it, sitting up straight gave the students more self-confidence.