

# Your mother was right: Study shows good posture makes you tougher

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Mothers have been telling their children to stop slouching for ages. It turns out that mom was onto something and that poor posture not only makes a bad impression, but can actually make you physically weaker. According to a study by Scott Wiltermuth, assistant professor of management organization at the USC Marshall School of Business, and Vanessa K. Bohns, postdoctoral fellow at the J.L. Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, adopting dominant versus submissive postures actually decreases your sensitivity to pain.

The study, "It Hurts When I Do This (or You Do That)" published in the [Journal of Experimental Social Psychology](#), found that by simply adopting more dominant poses, people feel more powerful, in control and able to tolerate more distress. Out of the individuals studied, those who used the most dominant posture were able to comfortably handle more [pain](#) than those assigned a more neutral or submissive stance.

Wiltermuth and Bohns also expanded on previous research that shows the posture of a person with whom you interact will affect your pose and behavior. In this case, Wiltermuth and Bohns found that those adopting submissive pose in response to their partner's dominant pose showed a lower threshold for pain.

## IMPLICATIONS

**Fake it until you make it**

While most people will crawl up into a ball when they are in pain, Bohn's and Wiltermuth's research suggests that one should do the opposite. In fact, their research suggests that curling up into a ball may make the experience more painful because it will make you feel like you have no control over your circumstances, which may in turn intensify your [anticipation](#) of the pain. Instead, try sitting or standing up straight, pushing your chest out and expanding your body. These behaviors can help create a sense of power and control that may in turn make the procedure more tolerable. Based on previous research, adopting a powerful, expansive [posture](#) rather than constricting your body, may also lead to elevated testosterone, which is associated with increased pain tolerance, and decreased cortisol, which may make the experience less stressful.

## **Keeping Your Chin Up Might Really Work to Manage Emotional Pain**

While prior research shows that individuals have used pain relievers to address emotional pain, it is possible that assuming dominant postures may make remembering a breakup or some distressing emotional event less painful.

## **Caregivers Need to Let Go**

Caregivers often try to baby those for whom they are caring to help make things easier and alleviate stress. In doing this, they force those they are caring for in a more submissive position—and thus, according to this new research, possibly render their patients more susceptible to experiencing pain. Rather, this research suggests that caregivers take a more submissive position and surrender control to those who are about to undergo a painful procedure to lessen the intensity of the pain experienced.

Provided by University of Southern California

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