

Rethink Sitting

How can I rethink something I've never even thought about?

Chairs – you'll find them everywhere: in every house, office, restaurant, movie theater, classroom and car... chairs. Chairs in myriad designs, colors and sizes, and all with a single purpose - for us to sit on them. And we sit: eat, talk, drive, watch television or a movie in the theater, use the computer - all while sitting on a chair. As Pisga Kasif, Fedenkrais teacher and facilitator of workshops for low sitting calls us, "a chair-sitting race".

The chair has become so omnipresent and trivial in our lives that we actually take it for granted. If someone were to ask you to sit, you would be very surprised if there weren't a chair in the area. Like Lennon wrote:

"She asked me to stay
And she told me to sit anywhere
So I looked around
And I noticed there wasn't a chair"

From the song:
Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)

This article is an invitation to stop for a second and think about something you normally take for granted. If we spend so much time sitting and especially sitting in chairs, maybe the time has come to think about this routine habit:

Is sitting on a chair our natural sitting position? Is it better for us? What implications does this habit have for our bodies? But that is not all.

Assuming that nature created us optimally for our environment, why

do we need a manmade accessory to perform a daily action like sitting? We do not purport to answer all these questions, but to open a window to introspection and rethinking, and to introduce you to FreeChair, a new and refreshing venture related to our sitting culture.

I don't think about it either - I still sit on it...

The chair is an ancient invention. It is even mentioned in the Old Testament: "And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting by himself alone in his cool upper chamber. And Ehud said: 'I have a message from God unto thee.'" And he arose out of his seat" (Judges 3:20). Chairs also appear in ancient Egyptian wall paintings. To the best of our knowledge, chairs were the property of kings and leaders and were designed to elevate them and distinguish them from the simple people, who evidently did not sit on chairs.

So how did the masses sit? Evidently on the ground or on some kind of padding, but in any event they sat low, without support for their backs. Now, just for a second, picture everyone you know sitting low: you, your children, boss, grandmother. What's wrong with the picture? If you've got young children, they can most probably sit low easily, upright and comfortably. The older the people you imagined are, the likelier it is that they will have a hard time lowering themselves to sit low, not to mention getting up... And what about staying in a low sitting position? Very few people in the Western world, aside from people who practice yoga,

meditation and other motion disciplines, will be able to find a comfortable and upright position that will allow them sit low for an extended period. Makes you wonder, no?

And we were not born that way - when we were toddlers, we had this ability...

Wonder what happened to it...

Maybe it doesn't have to be that way?

Some people don't think about it and don't sit on it either!

Let's go back and recall the image of everyone sitting low, but this time in rural areas in India, Thailand or Kenya - and it suddenly makes sense.

It is easy to picture people from those cultures, children and the elderly, sitting low or squatting while they eat, talk, cook and even... when they go to the bathroom.

Tzafirir Yitzchak, Alexander Technique teacher, tai chi instructor and performer, argues that we are the minority, and the world consists of one-third chair sitters and two-thirds ground sitters. So how have we moved so far away from the ground that we even have a hard time sitting on it again? To illustrate this, let us relate the story of two babies:

One baby from the "ground sitters" culture, and the other, western, who could be anybody, you or me.

When several months old, the two babies already know how to sit up on their own. On a mat, the sand, rug or parquet floor - they sit on their sitting bones, with their legs extended in front of them, upright, proud and smiling.

For the parents of the Western baby, this is the sign - we can start seating our child in a chair. First in a high chair and then, in a little chair near a little table to color and play, and needless to say once the child goes to nursery school, small cute chairs will be waiting.

The "ground sitting" toddler continues to eat and play while sitting on the floor. He may still never have even seen a chair.

Our Western toddler is now a young boy - he goes happily and proudly to first grade. And so a 12-year chapter in his life begins, in which he will spend many hours a day on a chair at school. In the afternoon, he may spend more hours in front of the computer and television, again with the constant assistance of said accessory.

Needless to say, the ground-sitting child doesn't experience any of these things.

And here is where the difference between them develops, beyond life style. The Western child, who has grown accustomed to sitting on an elevated chair with a backrest, is losing the ease and uprightness of sitting low.

He still sits and plays on the rug, but it isn't as comfortable as it used to be: the straightening muscles of the back have gotten used to having a backrest around that does the work for them, and they start to forget how to carry and balance the weight of the head above the sitting bones. As a result, his shoulders begin to hunch forwards, and his back is no longer erect.

And so the gap between the two children in our story grows:

One of them, throughout his life, retains his natural ability to hold himself erect when sitting, and the other - loses this ability.

There is another reason for this difference: there is only one comfortable way to sit low - when the weight of the body is exactly on the sitting bones.

However, there are many ways to sit (relatively) comfortably on a chair with a backrest - slightly tilting the back forward or backward, with the pelvis sliding forward and more.

While they are still young, our two children sit intuitively and are unaware of their sitting bones. They don't even know they have sitting bones, or where they are. It is just the most comfortable way for them to sit on them.

And then, the Western child is exposed to the option of sitting comfortably in other positions through the use of a chair. And when he goes back to low sitting, he has a hard time finding a comfortable position. In other words, he cannot find his sitting bones. And for the most part, he also will not have anyone around him who can remind him and teach him. Another 20 years of sitting on chairs at university, work, car and home will pass, until our child, who is now an adult, decides to take yoga classes. There he may learn for the first time that he has that kind of limb, designed for sitting, and try to practice sitting on it.

But then, his hips and knees are no longer as flexible as they once were, and sitting low will be a complex and uncomfortable task for him.

And moving quickly to the land of floor sitters - our child continues to sit

low throughout his life. His body never forgot how to do it. His joints remain open, and his muscles are strong and flexible thanks to daily exercise of sitting and getting up from the ground.

And that's the end of our story. And now you may ask - so what? So what if we are a culture that has a hard time sitting low. Fortunately, chairs are everywhere. Indeed, a very good question.

Unfortunately, we do not know of serious research that has examined the impact of "chair addiction" on our bodies, souls and, of course, our culture. We can only guess that it has a major impact on our posture, frequency of backaches and pressure on the neck, slipped discs and osteoporosis. One thing's for sure: sitting in a chair is not a natural sitting position for humans. And so much sitting in a position that is unnatural certainly has implications on our physical independence, our ability to hold ourselves erect, balance our body and keep it healthy and vital over time.

Now I've started thinking about it, but am still sitting on it!

So what now? Throw the chair out the window, quit the office and start boycotting buses? That's one way of looking at it, and as we've already noted, in this article we are trying to make you think, not necessarily act. But we have a few less radical, and perhaps more realistic suggestions... First of all - awareness. We can, and should, direct discourse towards rethinking the way we sit. And secondly - an opportunity. You can

create opportunities to sit low. You do not need to boycott chairs, but you should balance their use with proactive low sitting, when appropriate. Even one hour a day of low sitting will help our bodies remember that they are independent and free.

But how do we start? It is uncomfortable for so many people. It seems inappropriate in so many situations...

Freechair- rethink sitting:

And so, this is FreeChair's mission: to develop, create and distribute as many options as possible for accessible low sitting that fits into our modern lives.

FreeChair strives to bring as much awareness as possible to issues related to the quality of our sitting and, additionally, to develop and distribute products and solutions that make low sitting accessible to everyone.

The company's flagship product is a low and swaying chair that is lightweight and stylized, and actually invites you to sit low: When sitting on it, your pelvis is elevated about 10 cm from the ground, reducing the stress on the joints. Its ability to move enables personal adaptation of the sitting angle, depending on our own flexibility. The possibility of moving on it while sitting prevents specific loads from being created where undesirable, contributes to a pleasant and invigorating circulation of blood flow. Thanks to all these features, FreeChair's chair also makes low sitting possible for some of the

people who up until now have had a hard time with it. And perhaps most importantly, FreeChair seats us on our sitting bones and reminds us that we have the ability to sit upright without support.

As Mira Artzi Padan, a respected teacher of yoga for women, summed it up: "It's hard to sit incorrectly on it..."

Now that you've thought about it, you can begin to rethink sitting...