

HEALTHY LIVING



Posture

Posture is the position in which we hold our bodies while standing, sitting, or lying down. Healthy posture is the correct alignment of body parts supported by the right amount of muscle tension against gravity. Our everyday movements and activities can affect this alignment and put stress on joints and muscles, sometimes resulting in pain and potentially permanent damage if left unchecked over time. Utilizing proper ergonomic and movement strategies can help prevent these problems.

Why is posture important?

We do not consciously maintain our posture; instead, certain muscles normally do it for us. Several muscle groups, including the hamstrings and large back muscles, are critically important in maintaining our posture. These postural muscles, along with others, when functioning properly, prevent the forces of gravity from pushing us over forward. Postural muscles also help maintain our balance while we move.

A healthy posture helps us stand, walk, sit, and lie in positions that place the least strain on supporting muscles and ligaments during movement and weight-bearing activities. Correct posture also:

- Helps us keep bones and joints in correct alignment so that our muscles are used correctly, decreasing the abnormal wearing of joint surfaces that could result in degenerative arthritis and joint pain.
- Reduces the stress on the ligaments holding the spinal joints together, minimizing the likelihood of injury.
- Allows muscles to work more efficiently, allowing the body to use less energy and, therefore, preventing muscle fatigue.
- Helps prevent muscle strain, overuse disorders, and even back and muscular pain.

What can affect my posture?

To maintain healthy posture, you need to have adequate and balanced muscle flexibility and strength, normal joint motion in the spine and other body regions, as well as efficient postural muscles that are balanced on both sides of the spine. In addition, you must recognize your postural and movement habits at home and in the workplace and work to improve them, if necessary.

Poor posture and poor movement patterns can lead to excessive strain on our postural muscles and may even cause them to relax when held in certain positions for long periods of time. You can typically see this in people who bend forward at the waist for a prolonged time in the workplace. Their postural muscles are more prone to injury and back pain.

Several contributing factors can put a strain on posture. The most common are stress, obesity, pregnancy, weak postural muscles, abnormally tight muscles, and high-heeled shoes. In addition, decreased flexibility, a poor work environment, incorrect working posture, and unhealthy sitting and standing habits can also contribute to poor body positioning, leading to pain or overuse injuries in some cases.



Can I improve my posture?

Awareness of your posture, along with an understanding of healthy movement strategies, will help you consciously correct yourself. Your doctor of chiropractic can further assist you by recommending exercises to strengthen your core postural muscles. He or she can also assist you with choosing better postures during your work or recreational activities, reducing your risk of injury.

Ergonomic Considerations

How we hold and move our bodies every day, even while doing something as simple as sitting at a desk or standing in place, can have an impact on our posture. Below are some general ergonomic tips to help reduce the chance of pain and injuries:

While sitting at a desk:

- Keep your feet on the floor or on a footrest, if they don't reach the floor.
- Don't cross your legs. Your ankles should be directly in front of your knees.
- Keep a small gap between the back of your knees and the front of your seat.
- Your knees should be at or below the level of your hips.
- Adjust the backrest of your chair to support your low- and mid-back or use a back support.
- Relax your shoulders and keep your forearms parallel to the ground.
- Avoid sitting in the same position for long periods of time. Take breaks and move your body

When standing:

- Bear your weight primarily on the balls of your feet.
- Keep your knees slightly bent.
- Keep your feet about shoulder-width apart.
- Let your arms hang naturally down the sides of the body.
- Stand straight and tall with your shoulders pulled down and backward.
- Tuck your stomach in.
- Keep your head level. Your earlobes should be in line with your shoulders. Do not push your head forward, backward, or to the side.
- Shift your weight from your toes to your heels, or one foot to the other, if you must stand for a long time.

When lying down in bed:

- Find the mattress that is right for you. While a firm mattress is generally recommended, some people find that softer mattresses reduce their back pain. Your individual comfort should guide your choice.
- Choose the right pillow, too. Special pillows are available to help with postural problems resulting from poor sleeping positions.
- Avoid sleeping on your stomach.
- Sleep on your side or back, which is often helpful for back pain. If you sleep on your side, place a pillow between your legs. If you sleep on your back, keep a pillow under your knees.

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