



# Stand up for yourself

If eyes are the windows to the soul then posture is the window to the spine. Poor posture is a clear sign that there is a problem with a person's spine.

One indicator of poor posture is a slouching or forward head stance. This posture restricts lymphatic drainage in the neck, contributing to sinus problems, allergies and colds. It also causes undue strain on the cervical spine, potentially leading to premature arthritis of the neck. Causes of this type of posture include car accidents, injuries or poor ergonomics when using a computer or reading.

Another common posture problem is a forward tilt of the pelvis. This causes chronic lower back pain, muscle pain, sciatica and leg weakness.

Chiropractors are experts at analyzing posture and spinal problems. When evaluating a patient's spinal alignment, I watch for clues that contribute to the postural patterns observed such as:

- Changes in stance
- The outward turning of one or both feet
- Alignment of the knees
- Leveling of the hips or pelvis
- Height differences across the shoulders
- Tilting of the head and neck
- Forward tilting of the pelvis
- Increase in the spinal curvatures

Any of these postural changes distort proper alignment of the spine. Distortions

in spinal alignment are indications of a possible subluxation—a condition, which is treated only by chiropractors. A subluxation is a misalignment of one or more vertebrae which in turn, affects the nerves and any area of the body supplied by those nerves.

### What can I do to improve my posture?

A big problem that can be corrected easily is to sit less by making a conscious effort to get up every 30 to 40 minutes to walk around and stretch a little. The fact is, sitting puts a tremendous strain on our lower backs.

Also, regular spinal examinations are a simple and ideal opportunity for early identification of postural "red flags." Just like a routine dental cleaning and check up prevents cavities, a routine spinal exam provides patients with early intervention and treatment.

If necessary, treatment may take the form of corrective adjustments, exercises and stretching techniques or education on proper ergonomics. Being aware of the activities that put strain on your body and cause discomfort are the first step in correcting habits, including:

- **On the phone.** If you are used to cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder to take notes or drive, consider a headset for your landline and wireless telephones.

The cost and clarity have improved greatly and your neck will have far less tension.

- **Sitting.** A cushy sofa or chair is inviting at the end of the day, but furniture that is too soft doesn't provide support for your back. Whenever possible, choose furniture with a solid seat and back support if you are going to sit. If you lay down on that comfy sofa preferably lay on your side or back.

- **Out and about.** Beach, benches and picnic tables are summer norms. Each of these on their own are OK for short periods, but more commonly are used for hours at a time. Generally speaking, beach chairs are a better choice than just sitting on the sand. And now portable stadium seats offer spectators a break from the pain of sitting on a hard bench.

- **Reading.** The age of technology brought its own variety of postural pain conditions at work, and at home as computers become a household staple. One of the biggest culprits? Reading or working with a chin down position to view a laptop or book. This puts excessive stress on the back of the neck, or trapezius muscles, that support your cervical spine. Resting the book on the table in front of you and lowering your eyes, instead of the book, will help immensely.

Workplace ergonomics are in a class all their own. In fact, my colleague Dr. Peter Norton often educates local businesses on this subject.

The health benefits of good posture go a long way to preventing back, neck, hip, and knee pain. Good posture also gives your diaphragm and rib cage more room to expand when you breathe.

Aside from that, good posture makes you look taller, slimmer, and more confident, and who couldn't use a little bit more of those?

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