

Make Sure You're "Posture Perfect"

If you look at someone from the side, you'll notice that their spine isn't straight. There are curves built in, and these curves help make up a person's posture. Our neck (cervical spine) has an inward curve, our upper back (thoracic spine) has an outward curve, and our low back (lumbar spine) again has an inward curve. Our body likes to keep these curves in place throughout the day, whether you are sitting, standing, walking, lifting or carrying a load.

The placement of our shoulders and head can and will affect our posture. If you stood next to a perfect vertical line, you should have your ear over your shoulders, which in turn should be over your hips, which should then be over your knees and ankles. This would be "normal posture". If our head is too far forward, it can lead to an increase in the curves of the neck and upper back, and over time can lead to a "hunchback" or stooping. If our shoulders are rounded forward, it can lead to tension in our postural muscles of our upper back and neck.

Because our spine is connected, if the neck and upper back begin to hurt or are out of correct posture, chances are your low back will be affected as well. When we are standing, if you are stooped over a countertop, the stress on your low back muscles will be increased, causing discomfort or pain.

Many people, when they are sitting, like to slouch down in the chair because it "feels comfortable." Slouching may feel comfortable for the first 5 or 10 minutes, but over time it can cause great harm to the structures in our low back. You could compare it to a farmer who keeps adding straw on the back of a donkey. Eventually you will get to that one straw that breaks the donkey's back.

If you concentrate on improving your posture, you may find that you will have less aches and pains in your low back and neck. You may also prevent future problems that may arise due to years of poor posture.

HELPFUL HINTS AND TIPS:

When sitting, make sure that your hips and low back are all the way back against the seat. Take a small towel and roll it up. Place the towel roll between the seat back and the small of your low back. Then lean back into the chair. The towel roll will help to support the curve of our low back (this is also known as a lumbar support).

In standing, get a small step-stool (4-6 inches tall) and place one foot on the stool. This will bring your body upright, and help to keep the curves of our back. Switch feet every so often. If you are brushing your teeth or washing dishes, open the cabinet under the sink and place your foot on the first shelf. This will have the same affect as the step-stool.

If you work at a desk all day, there are several things that may help. First if you use a computer, your whole body should be square with the monitor and keyboard. Second, the top of the monitor should be even with your eyebrows. This will help to limit excessive bending of your neck. Try not to sit for more than 30 minutes at a time: get up and move around every now and then. Roll your shoulders up and back and rotate your neck in clockwise and counter-clockwise circles a couple times before you return to your chair.