

The Importance of Good Posture

Good posture helps prevent back problems. In fact, good posture is so important to good spinal health, a patient's posture is one of the first signs a chiropractor notes.

WHAT IS GOOD POSTURE?

Spinal balance is the key. Generally, in the standing posture, balance occurs when the inward curve of the lower spine is reasonably shallow, the head is directly above the sacrum and the curves of the spine contribute to balance rather than detract from balance. Good posture also demands a level pelvis.

As the body bends, flexes, sways and so on — in its everyday movements — good posture is attained and maintained by the muscles and ligaments of the spine with little or no attention by the individual.

POOR POSTURE

By exerting undue stress on the back's muscles, ligaments and the spine itself, poor posture is a major cause of back pain, back problems and other health problems.

WHAT IS POOR POSTURE?

Lack of balance is the key. Stooped shoulders, sunken chest, protuberant abdomen, restricted spinal movement and swayback typify poor posture.

SITTING AND SLEEPING AFFECT POSTURE

Among other factors, posture is influenced by your usual sitting and sleeping positions. Since sitting and sleeping probably occupy far

more of your time than standing, improper sitting and sleeping positions substantially contribute to poor posture and back problems.

SLEEPING

- A firm mattress is a must.
- Sleeping on the stomach is a no-no because it tends to increase the lower back's spinal curve — a prime cause of backache.
- Sleeping on the back with only a small pillow is good for most people.
- Sleeping on the side with only a small pillow keeping the head level is good, too.

SITTING

Surprisingly, faulty sitting increases the load on your lower back more so than standing. Here are a few sitting tips:

- The configuration of your chair should be conducive to maintaining the slight inward curve in the lower spine. If padded, the padding should not be so bulky as to increase the spinal curve. A pillow at the base of the spine may help.
- So that you aren't constantly leaning forward and thereby putting additional stress on your back, your chair should fit under the desk so that you are close to the desk.
- Chair armrests may help maintain proper sitting posture.
- Your feet should be flat on the floor, thighs horizontal or even raised a few degrees at the knees by using a very low stool under the feet.

- Now and then, stand up, walk around the room or down the hall and do a few stretches.
- When driving, move the car's seat forward and backward from time to time. This alleviates back muscle fatigue. A pillow at your lower back helps keep you from slouching while driving.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Poor health and poor posture are often subtly intertwined in a vicious cycle that calls for a thorough chiropractic examination designed to determine the underlying cause. Chiropractic's record in the treatment of postural and related back problems is enviable.

HOME-STYLE POSTURE TEST

- With your back to a wall, stand as you normally do — making no attempt to stand straighter or taller than usual. Your upper back and your buttocks should touch the wall without effort.
- Now slide the flat of your hand into the spinal curve between the middle of your back and the lower back. Your hand should almost touch your back and the wall at the same time.
- Extra space in the curve may mean you have excessive lordosis, commonly called swayback. Swayback is often a major factor in poor posture leading to back pain.

NOTE: This home posture test, done without the benefit of a chiropractic examination, is not meant to be definitive.