

Be Well Aware – Health Article



How to Improve Your Posture: Habits, Exercise, and Stretching for Success

What is Posture?

The American Chiropractic Association defines posture as “the position in which we hold our bodies while standing, sitting, or lying down”. Without our muscles holding our posture, gravity would take over and we would fall to the ground. But since our muscles maintain our posture for us, we don’t always consciously think about it.

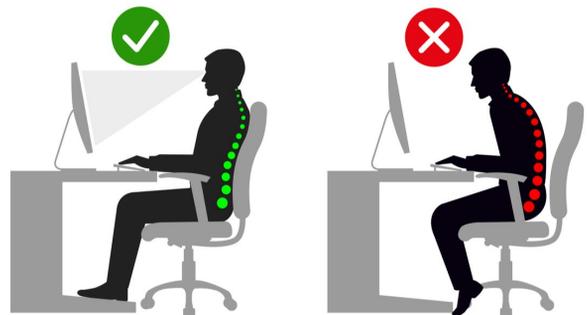
Good posture means that our body parts are aligned correctly using the right amount of muscle tension. But why is this important? Correct alignment of our bones and joints can decrease abnormal wearing of the joints, which can cause arthritis and pain. Good posture reduces the stress put on our ligaments and joints and helps to minimize the likelihood of injury. Good posture also helps the muscles work more efficiently, helping us to use less energy and prevent muscle fatigue, strain, overuse, and pain.

Habits for Good Posture: Sitting

An 8-hour workday may seem like even longer if you spend most of it – if not all of it – sitting at your desk. And 40 hours a week is a lot of time that you can either make yourself susceptible to injury, or work to avoid it. Since we know prevention is better than cure, take some time to practice sitting with good posture so you can stay comfortable and safe at work.

The following tips will help you sit safely, whether you’re at working out of the office or at home:

- 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 stay 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 lower and middle back or use a back support. Relax your shoulders and keep your forearms parallel to the ground.
- Avoid sitting for long periods of time. Get up every 20-30 minutes and take a 1 to 2-minute walk!



Posture During Exercise

You're finally at the gym after a long day of practicing good posture while sitting at your desk. Phew, a break from thinking about posture! But wait, is posture important during exercise, too? YES! In the long run improper posture during exercise can place strain on your muscles and soft tissues, causing pain and injury. Add a dumbbell or barbell and this chance of injury may increase. This is why it's important to take the time to align your body properly and stay mindful of how your body is feeling.

Here are some posture recommendations to keep in mind while exercising:

- Keep your neck in line with your spine, your chin aligned with your neck, and your ears over your shoulders
- Keep your back straight, and your shoulders back, relaxed, and down
- Keep a slight bend in your knees – don't lock them
- Keep your pelvis slightly tucked under, and belly button pulled back towards your spine



References:

<https://acatoday.org/content/posture-power-how-to-correct-your-body-alignment>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-good-posture-matters>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/common-posture-mistakes-and-fixes/?tabname=exercise-tips>



Flexibility and Posture

Is bad posture always just a bad habit? Not necessarily. Tight, stiff, inflexible muscles can also be to blame. Since muscles come in pairs that counterbalance each other (such as biceps and triceps, quadriceps and hamstrings), tightness in one muscle group may cause pulling of the body in a certain direction, causing bad posture. For example: overly tight, shortened hip muscles can pull your upper body forward, and overly tight chest muscles can pull your shoulders forward.

Including both dynamic stretches and static stretches in your exercise routine may be the most beneficial. Warming up with dynamic stretches, which incorporate movement (such as brisk walking, arm circles, or trunk rotations) can help prepare your body for more rigorous exercise. Static stretches, which hold a position for a set period of time, can be done at the end of your workout to help lengthen and counterbalance tight muscles. But don't limit your stretching routine to the gym – performing stretches throughout the day such as shoulder rolls, ear-to-shoulder stretches, and toe touches can greatly improve your flexibility and posture.