



Posture

Posture is the position in which you hold your body upright against force of gravity while standing or sitting. Your posture constantly changes depending on the activity, however no matter what you are doing, there is a way of holding and moving your body that is balanced and efficient. This is called good posture.

Good posture requires the least amount of muscle activity to breathe well and to maintain an upright position. The feet should be placed comfortably apart, with the weight distributed evenly over both feet. From a front or back view, the shoulders, the hips, and the fingertips should be approximately aligned. From a side view, the ear and the shoulder should be aligned, and that line projected downward should fall in front of the middle of the knee. The back should not be excessively arched. The arches of the feet should be visible without conscious effort.

Good posture means your bones are properly aligned and your muscles, joints and ligaments can work as nature intended. It means your vital organs are in the right position and can function at peak efficiency. Good posture also helps contribute to the normal functioning of the nervous system.

Body mechanics refers to the way we move our body. Posture is an important component in body mechanics. Good posture generally means the spine is in a 'neutral' or 'resting' position. The four normal curves of the spine are natural. This position is not static (fixed) and is individual. A neutral spine is one in which the position is comfortably maintained by the discs, bones, and ligaments.



Tips For A Healthier Posture

Tip # 1: Visualize Proper Posture

Visualize a plumb line hanging from each ear lobe. In good posture the plumb line will drop straight down from the ear lobe through the shoulder area, down the middle of the arm through the anklebone. Your chin should be slightly tucked, shoulders slightly back and level with the pelvis shifted forward allowing the hips to align with the ankles.

Be aware of your posture during daily activities. When experiencing back or neck pain, check your posture. Correcting your posture may ease the pain. Good posture should be a part of all activities to minimize harmful stress to the spine.

Poor posture is easy whereas adapting habits of good posture often require conscious effort. Most people do not think about their posture until someone brings it to their attention. The benefits of good posture far outweigh the ease of slouchy poor posture.

You could say that poor posture habits have followed trends in society. Children carry huge over loaded backpacks, adults lug briefcases to work, and thousands of people spend hours hunched over a computer whether for work or play.

Good posture means there is musculoskeletal balance. This balance helps to protect the joints in the spine from excessive stress.

Tip #2: Minimize Bending and Twisting

One movement that tends to aggravate back pain, more than others, is bending and twisting simultaneously! Combined, these movements place force on the facet joints and the discs. Some people often bend and twist to pick an object off the floor, reach for the milk in the refrigerator, pull a file out of the cabinet, and so on.

Better mechanics would be to face the object and bend at the hips instead of the waist or squat. Keep the back straight. Use your legs and feet to position yourself close to the object to be picked up. Take a moment to think about using body mechanics to prevent injury.



An example of poor body mechanics

Tip #3: Plan for Lifting and Carrying

Test the weight of the object to be lifted. An easy way to determine if you can lift it without assistance is to try pushing the object with your foot. Remember that even lightweight objects that are large in size, or cumbersome, may best be handled with assistance.

Determine what you will do with the object after lifting it. If moving the object to another location, clear obstacles out of the way. Plan the best way to hold or grip the object to keep it close to your body before lifting.

Position your body close to, and directly facing, the object. Place your feet flat on the floor, shoulder width apart, to provide a stable base for your body. To turn directions use your feet to pivot. Do not twist!

Depending on the shape of the object, try to hold it at the sides and bottom, and close to your body. If possible, keep your elbows bent while carrying an object.

Use the muscles in your legs as the power for lifting not the back! Bend the knees, keep the back straight, and lift smoothly. Repeat the same movements for setting the object down.

Tip #4: Reaching Up, Down or All Around

Many of the same principles of good body mechanics in lifting apply to reaching. You will need to determine the object's weight and size, its location and planned destination. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance!

Remember the basics: (1) clear obstacles out of the way, (2) get close to the object, (3) face the object, (4) use your legs and feet for proper stable positioning, (5) determine the best way to hold the object, (6) maintain good posture and (7) do not bend and twist simultaneously.

If a ladder or step ladder is required to access the object make sure it is stable and adequate to position your body close to the object. Standing on tiptoes places your body in a precarious position! If required, use one hand for additional support.

Avoid body positions that hyperextend the neck such as looking overhead especially for prolonged periods of time. This can cause stress to the spine resulting in pain!

Tip #5: Smart Storage

Plan how you will store things to make them easy to get to and remove. The heaviest and most frequently used items should be stored at waist height. This can help make it easier to face the object, get close, and pull it toward your body, while maintaining good posture. Lighter and less frequently used items can be stored on higher, or lower, shelves.

Consider using more than one canister to hold that five kilogram bag of flour. Dividing the weight can make it easier to remove and replace items. Apply this principle in the kitchen, bathroom, wardrobes and garage.

Tip # 6: Chairs and Sitting

One of the best investments is a good, ergonomically designed, chair! Whether you are working at a desk or watching television the right chair is helpful for good posture, body mechanics and comfort.

The way you sit is as important as what you sit on! Position your buttocks at the rear of the seat. If you are short you may need a cushion to fill the gap between your buttocks and the back of the chair seat. When properly seated there should be some space between the back of the knees and the chair seat. Lean your spine against the back of the chair to relax muscles in the spine.

If your chair is equipped with a lumbar support adjust it to fit the curve in your low back.

A footrest can help you maintain good posture. Position the footrest so the knees are level with the hip joint.

Avoid sitting for prolonged periods of time. Get up, walk and stretch!

Tip # 7: Working at a Desk or Computer Workstation

With the right chair and a few accessories you can make working at a desk ergonomically correct. Work directly facing the desk or computer. The monitor should be at eye level and visible without turning the head or body. A document holder attached to the side of the monitor can make manuscript-typing neck friendly. An articulating arm can be used to house the keyboard at the correct height for working and can be easily pushed to the side when not needed.

If you spend a great deal of time talking on the phone, try using a headset. This will help you avoid cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder. Headsets also allow both hands to be free.

Tip # 8: Should I Push or Pull?

Pushing is the correct answer. When you push an object you use the muscles in your legs and back. When pulling some people have the tendency to use their back muscles to yank and pull. It is easier to keep your back straight while pushing. Lean into the object using your body weight to help push the object.

Tip # 9: Avoid Carrying Unnecessary Items

Carry only the items that are required for each particular day.

Avoid a heavy bag worn over one shoulder. This can place too much weight on one side of the body and can cause neck, shoulder, and back pain. If you must use a bag or briefcase with a single strap, make sure the strap is padded and wide.

People of all ages use a backpack today – preschoolers, students, office employees, teachers, backpackers, even grandparents! Many people pack the backpack to its absolute capacity! Some children carry almost as much weight in their backpack as they weigh! A loaded backpack should not exceed 15% of the body's weight.

Consider the following backpack tips:

- Choose a backpack made of a lightweight material.
- Make sure the shoulder straps are adjustable, wide and padded. A backpack with a waist/hip strap is preferable. Wear the pack with both shoulder straps and hip strap.
- Pack the heavier items close to the back. Backpacks with many compartments will help you equalise and distribute the load. Pointy objects should be packed away from the wearer's spine.

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Source:

- Garfin, Steven R. Use Good Body Mechanics to Help Keep Your Spine Safe. Department of Orthopaedics, University of California, San Diego, CA, USA
- Reference: American Chiropractic Association