

What Is a Key Indicator of Your Overall Health?

Posture has always been viewed as a key indicator of overall health. We usually associate good posture with beauty, confidence, youth and vitality—and for good reason.

According to the *American Journal of Pain Management*, “Posture affects and moderates every physiological function, from breathing to nervous system function ... Spinal pain, headache, mood, blood pressure, pulse and lung capacity are among the functions most easily influenced by posture ... To live a long, active, energetic life, few things matter more than good posture.”

In the long run, good posture may be as important to your health as nutrition, sleep and exercise. Your body simply functions better with good posture. You will experience less pain, less fatigue and fewer long-term health problems. If you spend hours working behind a desk, imagine the gain in productivity, as well as the potential decrease in back and neck problems.

How's Your Posture?

Here's an easy way to examine your current posture. First, look in the mirror and notice if your ears, eyes, shoulders and hands are level. Second, stand with your head, back, buttocks and heels against a flat wall. There should only be about an inch of space between the wall and your neck or lower back. Finally, let another person view you from the side. If you were to hang a string from the middle of your ear down to the floor, it should form a straight line down through your shoulders, hips, knees and ankles. If you notice problems with your posture, consult your physician or chiropractor. Bad posture is too serious to ignore.

Causes and Prevention

Bad posture has many causes: bad mattresses, unhealthy shoes, poor sleeping habits, poorly designed work environments, improper lifting, sitting too long, obesity, negative self-image—just to list a few. And it only worsens with age. Here are some tips for maintaining good posture.

- While sitting at work, keep your buttocks and back against the back of your chair. Keep your feet flat but elevated so your lower thighs are raised slightly above your seat. Your desk should be at elbow level and your computer screen high enough so you are not bending your neck very far forward.
- Use a similar position while driving. Don't sit on your wallet for long periods and consider placing a small pillow behind your lower back for support.
- Stand up and do a minute or so of stretching at least every 30 minutes while sitting.
- While sleeping on your back or side, your head should be level with your spine. A small pillow will accomplish this. Avoid thick pillows and saggy mattresses. To help maintain the appropriate curves, consider using a small pillow under your knees or lower back. Avoid sleeping on your stomach.
- Practice exercises that strengthen your core abdomen and pelvic muscles.
- Finally, discuss with your doctor any possible needs for calcium or vitamin D supplements.

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