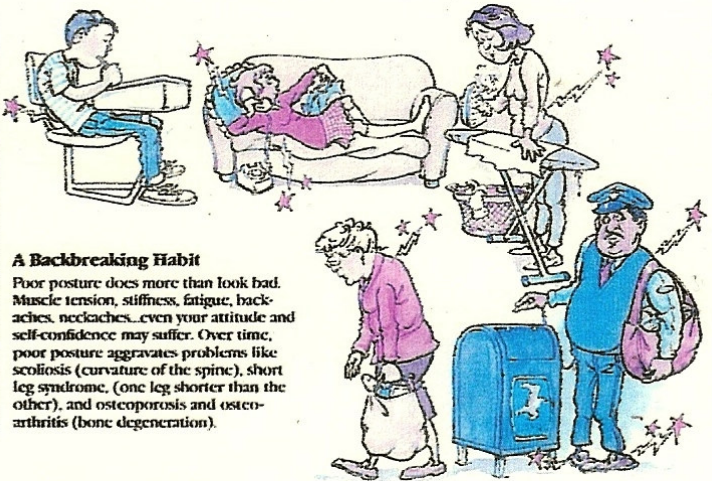


Poor posture starts as a comfortable habit, but eventually it starts — not just in your back, but all over. Those aches and pains may even be signs of a serious posture-related problem. So while learning good posture may feel strange at first, you'll be surprised at how quickly it becomes a comfortable habit, and how good it looks and feels. Good posture really does work. And it doesn't cost a dime.



A Backbreaking Habit

Poor posture does more than look bad. Muscle tension, stiffness, fatigue, backaches, neckaches...even your attitude and self-confidence may suffer. Over time, poor posture aggravates problems like scoliosis (curvature of the spine), short leg syndrome, (one leg shorter than the other), and osteoporosis and osteoarthritis (bone degeneration).

A Posture Plan That Works



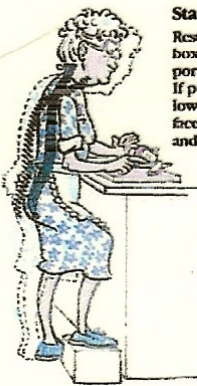
Good standing posture protects you from injury, boosts your comfort and energy, and is the basis for good posture in motion.

Good posture in motion (also called body mechanics) is the safest way to bend, lift, reach, and move throughout the day.

Posture exercises build strength and flexibility in the muscles that support your spine and allow you to have good posture.

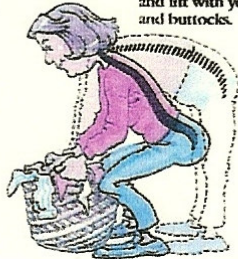
GOOD POSTURE IN MOTION

Good posture in motion (body mechanics) means maintaining your spine's three curves in their neutral alignment. Whether you're standing, lifting, or bending, good posture in motion is the safest, most efficient, and most comfortable way to move. You'll have more energy and less chance of backache, stiffness, or injury.



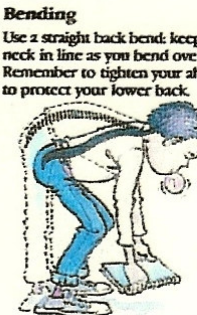
Standing

Rest one foot on a low box or stool to support your lower back. If possible, raise or lower your work surface so your shoulders and neck stay relaxed.



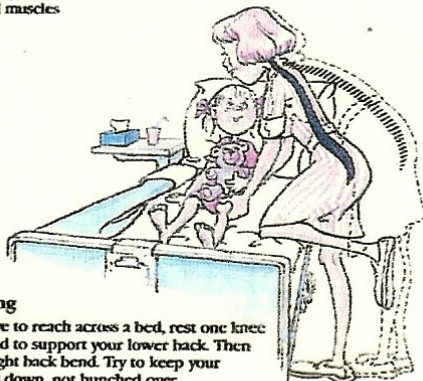
Lifting

Get close to the load and tighten your abdominal muscles. Use a straight back bend: keep your back and neck in line, bend over at the hips, and lift with your legs and buttocks.



Bending

Use a straight back bend: keep your back and neck in line as you bend over at the hips. Remember to tighten your abdominal muscles to protect your lower back.



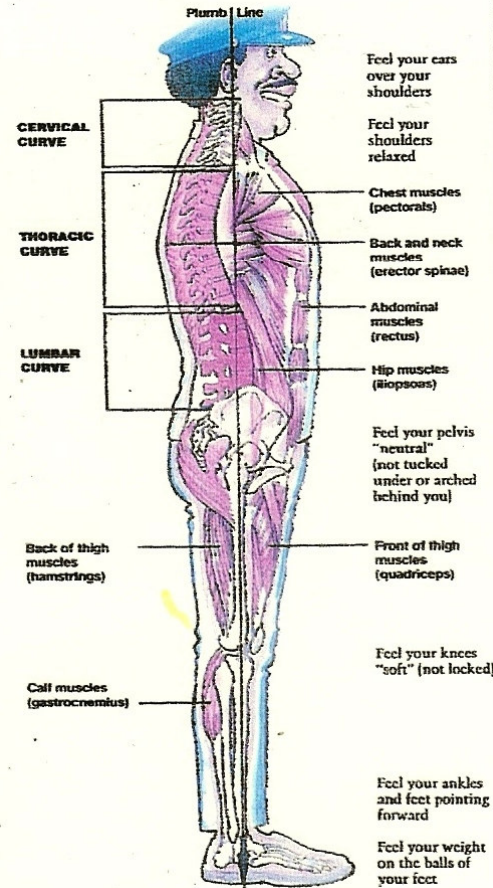
Reaching

If you have to reach across a bed, rest one knee on the bed to support your lower back. Then do a straight back bend. Try to keep your shoulders down, not hunched over.

The goal of good posture is to maintain the three natural curves of your spine in their normal, balanced alignment. To keep your spine aligned, you need strong, flexible muscles to hold your spine in position. Then, by learning how it feels to be in good posture, you'll develop the body awareness that helps you stay in good posture throughout the day, no matter what you're doing.

Your Three Natural Curves

Your spine has three natural curves: the cervical curve of your neck, the thoracic curve of your middle back, and the lumbar curve of your lower back. To test whether your three curves are in their natural alignment, imagine a plumb line beside your body. If your ears, shoulders, pelvis, knees, and ankles line up on the plumb line, your three curves are in their correct position.

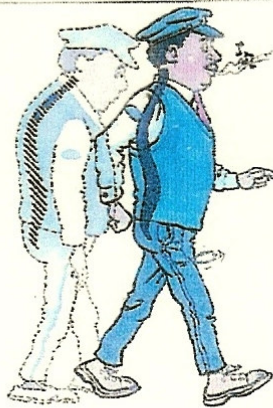


Strong, Flexible Muscles

Posture exercises give you the strength and flexibility you need to maintain your spine's three natural curves. Strong muscles hold the bones and joints of your spine in good posture. Flexible muscles won't pull your bones and joints out of line.

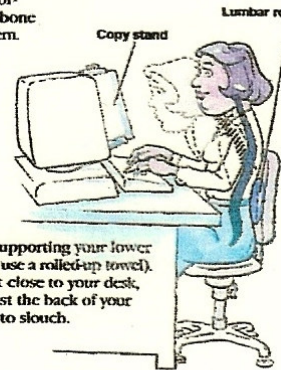
How Does it Feel?

You know you're in good posture when you can feel your ears, shoulders, pelvis, knees, and ankles lined up on the plumb line. So take a minute to close your eyes and really feel your body position in space. The more "body aware" you are, the easier it is to find and fix a posture problem.



Walking

Walk "tall." Pull your abdominal muscles in lightly to support your lower back. If your feet, knees, hips, or even back often hurt, you may need supports in your shoes (orthotics) to correct a muscle or bone alignment problem.



Sitting

Sit with a lumbar roll supporting your lower back (you can buy one or use a rolled-up towel). Use a copy stand and sit close to your desk, with your buttocks against the back of your chair, so you won't have to slouch.



Turning

Do a little "soft shoe," lifting your feet as you turn to each side. Keep your feet and hips moving with your upper body.

Sleeping

The best way to sleep is on your back with a small pillow under your knees, or on your side with a small pillow between your knees. Use only one pillow under your head, and sleep on a firm mattress to support your three curves.

