



GOOD POSTURE HELPS REDUCE BACK PAIN

Correct posture is a simple but very important way to keep the many intricate structures in the back and spine healthy. It is much more than cosmetic—good posture and back support are critical to reducing the incidence and levels of back pain and neck pain. Back support is especially important for patients who spend many hours sitting in an office chair or standing throughout the day.

Functions of the Low Back

- To absorb compressive forces because we walk upright.
- Provides flexible connection between the upper and lower half of the body
- Protects the spinal cord.

The low back is an ingenious invention providing shock absorption, flexibility and protection of the spinal cord. Unfortunately, this multipurpose structure is inevitably vulnerable to injury.

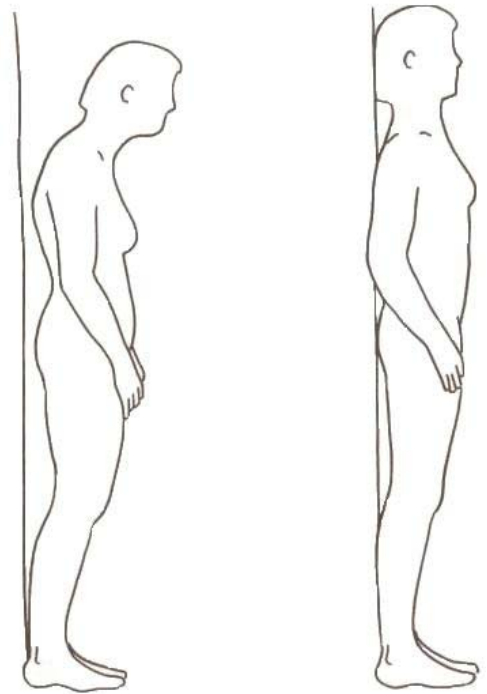
Problems caused by poor back support and posture

Not maintaining good posture and adequate back support can add strain to muscles and put stress on the spine. Over time, the stress of poor posture can change the anatomical characteristics of the spine, leading to the possibility of constricted blood vessels and nerves, as well as problems with muscles, discs and joints. All of these can be major contributors to back and neck pain, as well as headaches, fatigue, and possibly even concerns with major organs and breathing.

Identifying good posture

Basically, having correct posture means keeping each part of the body in alignment with the neighboring parts. Proper posture keeps all parts balanced and supported. With appropriate posture (when standing) it should be possible to draw a straight line from the earlobe, through the shoulder, hip, knee, and into the middle of the ankle.

Because people find themselves in several positions throughout the day (sitting, standing, bending, stooping, and lying down) it's important to learn how to attain and keep correct posture in each position for good back support, which will result in less back pain. When moving from one position to another, the ideal situation is that one's posture is adjusted smoothly and fluidly. After initial correction of bad posture habits, these movements tend to become automatic and require very little effort to maintain.



Identifying incorrect posture

The first step in improving posture is to identify what needs improvement by examining one's own posture throughout the day, such as sitting in an office chair, carrying objects, or standing in line. At regular intervals during the day, take a moment to make a mental note of posture and back support. This should be done through the normal course of a day to best identify which times and positions tend to result in poor posture. Some people find it easier to ask someone else to observe their posture and make comments or suggestions.

Examples of bad posture and back support

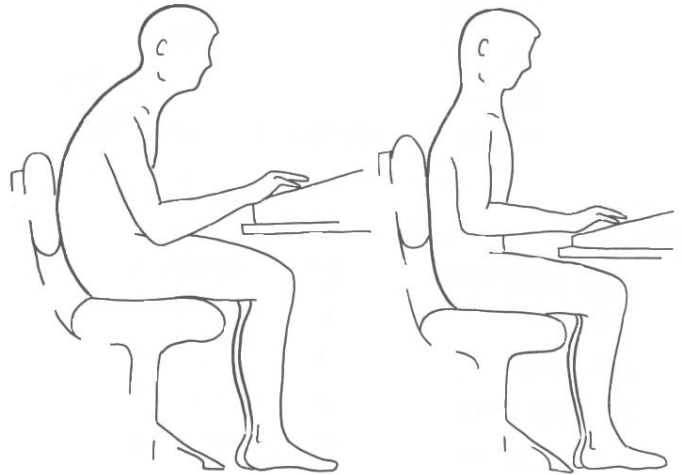
The following are examples of common behavior and poor ergonomics (posture in the workplace) that need correction to attain good posture and back support:

- Slouching with the shoulders hunched forward
- Lordosis (also called "swayback"), which is too large of an inward curve in the lower back
- Carrying something heavy on one side of the body
- Cradling a phone receiver between the neck and shoulder
- Wearing high-heeled shoes or clothes that are too tight
- Keeping the head held too high or looking down too much
- Sleeping with a mattress or pillow that doesn't provide proper back support, or in a position that compromises posture

Examples of bad posture while sitting in an office chair

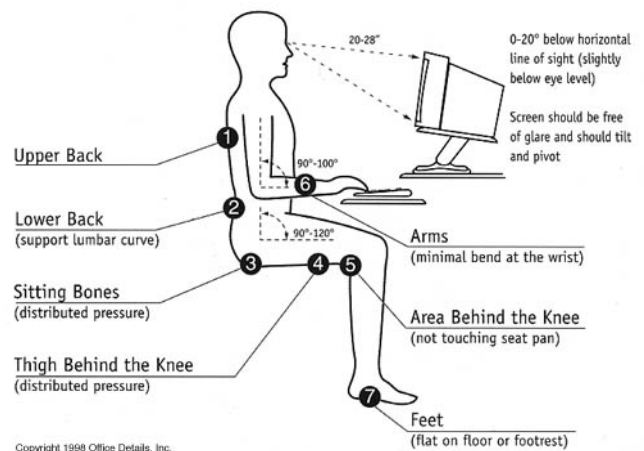
The following bad habits are especially common when sitting in an office chair for long periods of time

- Slumping forward while sitting in an office chair
- Not making use of the office chair's lumbar back support
- Sliding forward on the seat of the office chair



Ergonomic office chairs for back support

Office work often results in poor posture and strain to the lower back. Many people work sitting in an office chair that is not properly fitted to their body and does not provide enough lower back support. One strategy is to choose an ergonomic office chair that often provides better support than a regular chair and may be more comfortable for the patient. And use the chair! Many people have wonderfully designed ergonomic chairs but sit forward on the chair's edge, thereby not utilizing the design and intent of the chair.



Take a break from sitting in an office chair

In addition, the spine is made for motion, and when sitting in any type of office chair (even an ergonomic office chair) for long periods of time, it is best to get up, stretch and move around regularly throughout the day to recharge stiff muscles. In fact, most authorities agree that after 20 minutes the muscles fatigue and you begin to lean on your ligaments and joints. Getting up and walking around for 1 to 2 minutes allows the postural muscles to recover and resets the system for another round of postural demand.