

Health Notes

Posture and Your Health

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How one stands or sits affects multiple areas of our lives. Our breathing, blood flow, muscle tone, attitude and emotions can all be improved or made worse by posture. A common cause of osteoarthritis is poor posture.

Think of your spine as a coat rack. All your organs, muscles, vessels, and skin hang from this coat rack. If you tilt the coat rack forward, everything would shift in that direction.

If your spine is shifted in an unnatural direction, it changes the position of the organs in your body, affects blood flow and can decrease the ability of your lungs to expand. It would make some muscles tight and some overstretched, creating what we call a postural imbalance.

A study was done in 1995 that demonstrated if you were to lean forward 10 degrees, it would increase the pressure on the lumbar spine by 100 to 500 percent! Over 80% of people in the study whose spine was leaning incorrectly more than 3 degrees complained of low back pain.

There are many things we do day-to-day that constantly challenge our posture; hunching over the sink to do the dishes, or brushing our teeth, wearing high heels, bending and twisting to get clothes out of the dryer, sitting slumped in uncomfortable chairs, walking with our heads down, rounding our shoulders, cradling the phone between neck and shoulder, crossing our legs, bending from the waist to lift a child, the list goes on and on.

When we move in good posture, it creates the least amount of stress to our bodies. So, we need to learn what good posture is and how to maintain it throughout the years.

A postural "relief" exercise has been advocated incorporating the following components:

- Sit at the edge of a chair
- Have knees at least hip width apart
- Turn your feet out about 10 degrees
- Rest weight evenly between both feet and your buttocks
- Arch your low back slightly and lift your chest up towards the ceiling!
- Pull your chin in

- Put your arms out to the side, elbows straight, at a 45-degree angle from the floor with thumbs up
- Rotate thumbs backwards to the wall behind you

This posture is recommended to be practiced for 10 seconds every 20 minutes. Within a few weeks most people usually experience the sensation of sitting and standing straighter naturally.

When this occurs, conscious effort is not necessary because a new skill has been learned on an automatic basis. This is ideal as long-term compliance with exercise is difficult to achieve, but a new postural habit once learned is unlikely to be broken.

Continued use of this newly learned posture in all activities could decrease much stress on our bodies over time.

And a final thought on posture... Remember what Charlie Brown said, "When you're depressed, it makes a lot of difference how you stand... The worst thing you can do is straighten up and hold your head high because then you might start to feel better!" 🌟

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