



Posture 101

Adults don't tell you to "Sit up straight!" just to hear themselves talk — good posture can lead to good health and can prevent the following...

- tension headaches, fatigue, and cramping
- looking shorter or heavier than you really are
- looking "old" at an early age
- pain in the low back, neck, legs and shoulders
- muscle imbalances that can be difficult or impossible to correct
- difficulty sleeping
- eye strain

Did you know that posture affects almost everything you do? When you have good posture, you put less strain on your muscles and bones, you can breathe more deeply and digest your food better, and your circulation improves. Good posture can also make exercise more enjoyable, improve general fitness, enhance sports performance, and make you look more confident. Who knew?

So what is good posture?

- The ear, shoulder and hip should all line up in a straight line when looking at the body from the side (when sitting or standing).
- The shoulders should be level and pulled back slightly, not slumped or rounded forward.
- The low back should have a slight curve inward at all times — if you sit up as tall as possible with your chest up, this usually happens automatically.

The spine has three natural curves — one in the neck, one in the mid back, and one in the low back. It is important to maintain these curves so the body stays "stacked up" properly. When you have poor posture for long periods of time (this includes all the time), some muscles become weak, fatigued and overstretched. Other muscle groups become shortened or the ligaments (tough cord-like tissues that provide stability for the spine) become irritated. These muscle and tissue imbalances can result in burning or sharp pain, headaches, muscle spasms, back aches or stiffness. Not fun.

To correct your posture, you should start by trying to have proper posture as often as possible during your day. This is very difficult to do when sitting in desks at school. Try sitting on your "sit bones" with your feet flat on the floor and your bottom as far back in the seat as possible. Pull your shoulders back and pull your chest up slightly to develop the curve in your low back mentioned above — it is virtually impossible to maintain a low back curve when slouching down in the seat or putting your feet up on the chair in front of you. At first your muscles will not be strong enough to keep your posture correct all day, but as you begin using proper posture more frequently it will become easier and easier.

If you find it is painful to correct your posture or you continue to have difficulty after 6-8 weeks of self-correction, ask your doctor about setting up an appointment with a physical therapist.