

THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING BALANCED

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Can you think of one thing that contributes to increased energy, better breathing, improved circulation, and makes you feel better? You probably didn't guess good posture. Good posture can best be defined as our body's ability to constantly adapt to our physical environment in an efficient and balanced fashion. The way we sit, stand, sleep and work has the profound ability to affect our physical health. Learn more about the importance of good posture and the negative health consequences associated with bad posture.

One of the main reasons why poor posture has become so prevalent is that our 21st century life has created the 21st century posture. We use our bodies differently than our grandparents did. Advancements in technology, and a general demand for less physical activity have brought in an era of office work, Internet browsing, and countless hours of channel surfing on our favourite couch at home. Picture an individual sitting in front of a computer with the monitor off to their left and their keyboard six inches too high. Over time, the muscles in this person's low back, upper back, neck, wrists and elbows will become fatigued and achy due to the lack of balance, alignment, and efficiency of their posture. Repeated exposure to this common scenario will result in the body negatively integrating poor posture as a normal posture. Some of the more common symptoms of prolonged poor posture include, muscle and joint stiffness, low back and neck pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and headaches.



We use our muscles and joints to reflexively balance ourselves when we sit, stand, sleep, and work. Our muscles and joints allow us to feel balanced or unbalanced based on the information they send to the brain. The brain assumes we are balanced when we sense equal stress on both sides of the body. When we experience an injury, whether it is postural repetitive strain from sitting and working at our computer, a low back ache from yard work, or a twisted ankle from a weekend game of softball, the body will move differently to avoid pain. Over time, the body will adapt, but this adaptation is not necessarily good. Even if there is no continued pain, unbalanced patterns of motion persist. The human body still must be able to stand, hold our head upright, and move. So, the brain adapts and adopts new muscle and joint positions. We believe we are standing straight, holding our head straight, or

moving the same because our brain is being told by our senses that we are balanced, even though the mirror shows that we are not!

Negative adaptation is a common contributor to poor posture, injury, and chronic pain. Over time, the stress of unbalanced adaptive posture and motion results in muscle imbalances and joint wear. This begins a vicious cycle of unbalanced motion – causing breakdown – causing more unbalanced motion, and frequently secondary areas of

discomfort. Chronic poor posture results in unbalanced adaptation and constant muscle and joint stress. This is why, over time, posture worsens and body stress increases. To avoid the silent consequences of injury, and the pitfalls of poor posture, it is very important to have a qualified health practitioner evaluate and treat your injury and/or poor posture, even if you do not have serious symptoms. Chiropractors are well positioned to effectively evaluate and treat the effects of common muscle and joint injuries, and to help with poor posture. In addition, a knowledgeable chiropractor can offer valuable ergonomic advice on proper sitting and work postures. It must be remembered that over time, changes in posture and motion cause real physical change and breakdown in the body. Muscles become chronically tight. Ligaments stretch. Joints wear down. Ultimately, the chronic muscle spasm, onset of arthritis, and recurring injuries result from years of unchecked muscle and joint stress.

When it comes to posture, practice makes permanent, not perfect. Most of us have a variety of bad habits that can get in the way of good posture such as carrying a heavy bag or purse on one shoulder, cradling the phone between our shoulder and ear, and falling asleep on the sofa with our head on the armrest. Any of these can lead to pain, stiffness, and bad posture. Our good and bad habits shape our bodies, our posture, and our patterns of motion. We adapt to whatever we do repeatedly. Exercise strengthens our muscles and joints, while inactivity weakens them. Joint problems and stiffness usually mean that the joints are not being moved in a full, normal range of motion. Regular exercise consisting of cardiovascular, resistance, and flexibility exercises help strengthen our bodies and combat the negative effects of poor posture and aging.

There is no denying that practicing good postural habits has the ability to keep us physically healthy. Once again, I guess our mothers were right when they would repeatedly tell us to “sit up straight!”

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