

POSTURAL TIPS FOR AVOIDING MUSCLE AND JOINT PAIN: PART 2

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In last month's article we highlighted some of the common everyday activities that can lead to poor postural habits and the things that can be done to minimize the chance of injury. Good posture was defined as the body's ability to maintain an efficient, strong, and balanced position while interacting and adapting to our physical environment. Chronic poor posture was identified as a contributor to symptoms such as muscle and joint stiffness, nerve pain, headaches, neck pain, upper back and low back pain.

This article will focus on additional factors that can contribute to postural strain and the things that can be done to minimize the chance of injury.

- 1. Use proper lifting technique:** There are several strategies that should routinely be employed to ensure good posture during lifting activities. Maintaining the natural curve/hollow (lordosis) of your low back is important, as this is its strongest and most secure position. Avoid awkward postures such as bending, reaching, twisting, and turning as this makes the back less stable and puts extra stress on biological tissues. Alternatively, you should square your body toward the object being lifted, turn your whole body by moving your feet, and keep the object close to your body. Contracting your abdominal muscles during lifting, lowering, and moving activities improves spinal stability, referred to as bracing. You should bend at the legs and not the waist, lifting slowly and smoothly, not jerking.



- 2. Be careful with purses and backpacks:** A heavy purse or backpack worn over one shoulder can place too much weight and postural strain on one side of the body. Using a strap that is long enough to place over the head and resting it on the opposite shoulder can help distribute forces more evenly. Use straps that are adjustable, padded and at least two inches wide. It is also helpful to choose purses and backpacks made of light material such as vinyl or canvas instead of leather. Keep things light and avoid over-packing and carrying unnecessary items.

- 3. Choosing the right sleep environment:** Make sure that your mattress does not sag or that it is not too hard. A soft mattress can be comfortable provided it is placed on a firm support. Avoid beds with a wire base and use a solid base instead, with a rubber or innerspring mattress on top of it. Trying different sleeping positions may alleviate postural strain. When lying on your back, place a pillow under your knees to ease low back tension. When lying on your side, place a pillow between slightly bent knees to help keep the spine straight. Avoid using oversized pillows that put your neck in awkward positions, or undersized pillows that don't offer proper support. Only use pillows that align your head in a neutral position with the rest of the body.



- 4. Be smart when working at a workstation/desk:** Choose office furniture that is ergonomically designed to minimize postural strain. The workstation/desk should be

at elbow height. Use of an adjustable chair can help meet this need. Computer monitors should be at eye level for easy viewing. Do not



cradle the phone between your head and shoulder. Use of a headset or the speakerphone feature will keep your hands free and allow you to multi-task in a safe manner. While sitting, make sure that your weight is evenly distributed on your seat, your shoulders are not rounding forward, and you are not slouching. Your head should be resting on your torso and not poking forward. The use of a lumbar support can help maintain the natural hollow of your low back and preserve proper posture. Be sure to take stretch or posture breaks every 20 to 40

minutes, that allow you to stand, walk around and stretch out your legs and upper body.

- 5. Support your feet:** Our feet act as the base of support for the rest of the body. When this base is compromised, it can lead to postural strain. Avoid regularly wearing high-heeled shoes, which can negatively affect the body's centre of gravity. If you plan on spending a great deal of time on your feet, be sure to wear supportive footwear to prevent chronic strain and fatigue. When standing in one area for long periods of time, placing a rubber mat on the floor can provide support and improve comfort.

Good postural habits can help decrease abnormal and excessive stress on biological structures such as muscles, joints and nerves, thereby minimizing the chance of injury. Employing the strategies discussed in these articles can be helpful in minimizing the risk of developing muscle and joint stiffness, nerve pain, headaches, neck pain, upper back and low back pain related to chronic postural strain. Chiropractors are well positioned to effectively evaluate and treat the effects of common muscle and joint injuries related to poor posture. This may include symptomatic treatment, the prescription of appropriate stretching and strengthening exercises, or valuable ergonomic advice on proper sitting and work postures specifically for your circumstance. For more information visit www.nhwc.ca.

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