

POSTURE

We have all been told to stand up straight and not “slouch”. We understand that it is important to have good posture but we don’t always understand what that means. Proper posture is an alignment of the head, spine and extremities that provides maximal function. It is the attitude of the body – the natural and comfortable bearing of the body. It is maintained by the coordination of various muscles that move the limbs.

When the symmetry of structure is lost and integrity is compromised it can cause musculoskeletal breakdown, injury and pain. Muscles become imbalanced and can’t function optimally and it can also affect our internal organs.

ALIGNMENT OF THE SPINE

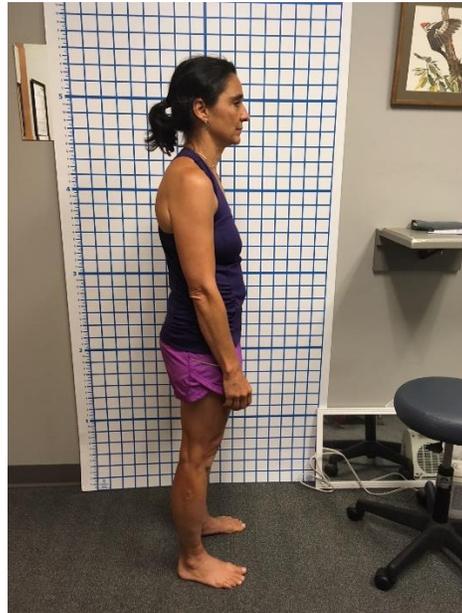
When looking at the body from the side view, a plumb line could be drawn from our ear, in line with the center of our shoulder, midway through the trunk, in line with the lateral hip and slightly in front of both the knee and ankle joint.



When looking at the body from the front or back, the head should be vertical, shoulders level, knees in line with the hip and ankles in line with the knees.



Typical “poor posture” that is often seen in the clinic is a forward head, rounded shoulders, increased rounding in the mid back (thoracic kyphosis), increased forward curvature of the low back (lumbar lordosis) and wide base of support with locking of the knees.



CORRECTION OF OUR POSTURE

Sitting posture: Sit on a firm surface, with feet on the floor and hips in line with or slightly higher than the knees. First, find a neutral low back position by arching and sagging the spine and then find mid line. Next shift the weight of your body forward into the middle of the pelvis with weight moving into the feet. Allow the stomach to relax. Next, take a deep breath and allow the rib cage to settle down on the stomach and lumbar spine and pull shoulders back then relax.

Normal



Poor

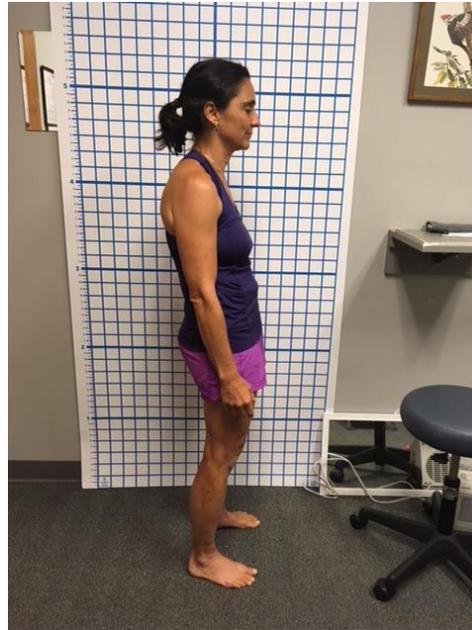


Standing posture: Start with corrections at the feet. Place feet in line with the hips (keep base of support about 6-7" apart). Next, rock your body forward and back and to find the middle of the feet. Next, shift weight side to side to find equal weight between the left and right foot. Lock knees then unlock knees to "soften" the knee joints. Relax the low back by slightly dropping the tail bone down. Take a deep breath and then exhale to allow the rib cage to drop and rest down on the pelvis and feel the weight into the abdomen and thighs. Then pull the shoulders back and relax. Position the head by lengthening the back of the neck and relaxing the chin down.

Normal



Poor



Remember proper standing and sitting posture should be relaxed and comfortable. Efficient alignment is a state of balance, not a holding position.

EXERCISES FOR IMPROVED POSTURE

1. Scapular retraction: In standing or sitting, pull the shoulder blades back and down but don't allow the rib cage to lift or spine to lean back. In this position, take a deep breath in and fully breath out and hold position for 3 sec. Relax and repeat regularly throughout the day.
2. Chin tucks: In standing or sitting, make sure the head is in good alignment – not looking up or down but straight ahead and try to sit or stand "tall". Then retract the head to make a double chin. Repeat about 5x and do throughout the day.
3. Chin tucks lying on your back: Lying on your back with knees bent tuck your chin and press your head into the pillow keeping the chin tucked to elongate the spine. Hold for 3-5 seconds and repeat 5-10x.
4. Shoulder presses: Lying on your back with your knees bent and arms at side with the palms up press the shoulders into the bed. Try not to allow the rib cage to lift from the bed as you press the shoulders, so take a deep breath and on the exhalation let the ribs drop then press shoulders into bed. Hold 3-5 secs and repeat 5-10x.

5. Anterior hip stretch: Stand holding to a firm surface, place your foot on a chair behind you and tilt your tail bone down to flatten the back. You should feel the stretch in the front of the thigh. Hold for 10 sec. and repeat 2-3x on both sides.

Remember, achieving good standing and sitting posture is one of the most important things you can do to improve your health and physical fitness.

Annette DuPont, PT
Pivot Physical Therapy
Asheville, NC 28801