

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Marc Schroeder & Dr. Fred Miller

Posture Practices and Low-Back Pain

“Stand up straight and tall.” “Don’t slouch!” “Keep both feet on the floor when you sit in a chair.”

Like family heirlooms, these phrases are passed down generation to generation: your grandparents said them to your parents, your parents said them to you, and now you say them to your children.

The best news about these postural proverbs is that they are absolutely true, according to your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic. How a person sits, stands and walks has a dramatic effect on his or her spinal health.

Vertebral Subluxations

Sub-optimal posture is a leading cause of *vertebral subluxations*.

This common condition occurs when spinal movement is restricted or spinal bones (vertebrae) become misaligned. Vertebral subluxations are linked with a myriad of health concerns, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches, backaches, infantile colic and ear infections. Your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic corrects vertebral subluxations with safe and gentle maneuvers called *chiropractic adjustments*.

Poor posture also damages areas of soft tissue and causes added wear and tear on joints. Optimal posture, on the other hand, strengthens the skeletal system.

The destruction caused by poor posture may also radiate throughout the body. For example, knee pain can result from misalignment in the pelvic region because the latter alters the natural walking posture.

That’s why, during a chiropractic examination, your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic may ask patients a series of questions related to the way they sit, stand and walk. Your doctor at Doctors Chiropractic will also complete a full analysis of their current posture.

Know Your Vertebrae

First, before continuing with this posture-perfect primer, take a moment to review the following vertebral anatomy:

Cervical vertebrae — seven spinal bones that support the neck.

Thoracic vertebrae — 12 spinal bones in the mid-back that connect to the rib cage.

Lumbar vertebrae — five spinal bones, substantially larger than those previously mentioned, located in the lower-back region. The lumbar bears most of the body’s weight and stress.

Sacrum — located just below the lumbar vertebrae, the *sacrum* connects with the pelvis and the *coccyx* or “tail bone.” The sacrum is flanked by the two hipbones, also known as the *iliac bones*.

Sitting

For the last minute or so, while reading this issue of *Optimal Health University™*, how has your posture been?

Reading with the head jutting forward strains the upper back, shoulders and neck. After time, this posture results in a straightening or “reversal” of the natural curve in the neck: an event that



may be evident on X-ray imaging. This common postural problem dramatically increases a patient’s odds of suffering head and neck pain.

Instead of adopting a gooseneck posture while sitting, keep your head aligned with your shoulders — with the middle of your back fairly straight.

Also, in addition to keeping your feet flat on the floor, it’s important to choose a chair that supports your lower back and lumbar vertebrae. And nowhere is this more important than in the workplace. Sitting for hours behind a stack of reports or a computer keyboard can exact a heavy toll on this injury-prone area.

Even with a superior chair, remember to take periodic stretch breaks and drink plenty of water to keep spinal cartilage hydrated.

Standing

For optimum posture, stand with your weight equally distributed on both feet — but *don’t lock your knees*. Also, avoid becoming a statue. If your job requires standing for extended periods of time, make sure to take adequate rest breaks. And ask your employer to provide a mat for you to stand on, versus concrete.

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Walking

Maintaining proper posture when walking makes breathing easier and also reduces the likelihood of developing low-back, leg and foot pain.

It's important to start out straight and tall. Leaning forward or arching your back strains muscles and vertebrae. A tip to help keep you from arching your back is to tuck in your "caboose!"

And don't let your stride get away from you. Too long of a stride can cause your body to lean back and put added strain on the lumbar region.

Posture Saboteurs

There are a number of spinal conditions that negatively affect posture, including the following:

"Military Neck"

When the bones of the neck are too straight, the resulting condition is known as straight or "military neck." This condition results in a loss of range of motion.

"Humpback"

Abnormal curvatures of the spine oc-

curred in approximately ten percent of the population in 1991: with one in 10,000 people having deformities of greater than 70 degrees. Exaggerations of normal thoracic (chest) curvature — also known as "humpback" — that exceed 70 degrees place a person at "increased risk of chronic respiratory failure." (*Chest* 1991;99:663.) But even slighter curves or humpbacks wreak havoc on the spine and overall health.

Swayback

Clinically known as *lordosis*, swayback is an abnormal forward curvature in the lumbar region that creates a "shelf" appearance over the buttocks.

Lordosis is associated with poor posture, osteoarthritis, neuromuscular problems, back surgery and hip disorders.

Flatback

Flatback syndrome, often a congenital condition, is also associated with adult degenerative scoliosis. Surgical fusion of the spine is yet another cause.

With flatback syndrome, vertebral disks in the lower back are pushed outward: the reverse of swayback.

This reduces the natural curve so that the back appears "flat" or flatter than it was originally.

The Weight Connection

Obese patients with large abdomens are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to posture. The excess weight tends to "pull them forward" and draws their spines out of alignment: compromising vertebrae in the lower back.

The spines of obese children also exhibit decreased bone mineral content (*Osteoporos Int* 2002;13:835-40).

Because of added wear and tear on the body, obesity also increases the likelihood of developing osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and degenerative disc disease.

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Posture Pearls

- ✓ Start each day with some *slow* and *gentle* stretches.
- ✓ Perform daily routines, such as shaving or putting on makeup, with posture in mind. Don't hunch over the sink, straining to see your reflection; instead, stand up straight. A mirror that attaches to an extension arm and brings your reflection towards you, instead of the other way around, can also be helpful.
- ✓ Halt painful phone calls by either holding the receiver, using a headset or opting for a speakerphone. Cradling the receiver between your head and shoulder can cause spinal joints in the neck and upper back to "hang up" and eventually disconnect you from life by causing pain.
- ✓ Roll those heavy bags; don't carry them. Wearing a shoulder strap over one shoulder destroys posture, making loss of balance more likely — which may cause shoulder and back pain. If wheels aren't an option, try a bag with a handle or a spine-friendly backpack (as long as it's not overloaded).
- ✓ Shun vertebral subluxations when sitting by not crossing the same knee over the other. This habit may eventually cause misalignment of the spine.
- ✓ Steer clear of sloppy driving posture. When sitting in the car, adjust the seat forward so your knees are higher than your hips.