

Mother's advice to sit up straight could help back

Remember when your mother would yell at you to sit up straight at the dinner table? Or when she would say not to slouch while watching television? Do you sometimes wish now that you would have paid a little attention to her requests for perfect posture?

Everyone and I mean everyone, during some part of the day, could use a gentle reminder of maintaining good posture.

Stress, working conditions, poor health, and good old gravity play havoc with our skeletal system and muscles resulting in the typical forward head, rounded shoulder, bowed out lower back posture that many of us assume throughout the day. A person with poor posture is more prone to be plagued by back pain, neck pain, headaches and a general feeling of fatigue than their more erect counterparts.

But what is "perfect posture"? Take a careful look at yourself next time you are standing in front of a full-length mirror. Take a front, side and if possible a back view to get the full picture of what your posture is like.

Ideal posture is when an imaginary line drawn from head to toe passes through the ear, the tip of the shoulder, the hip bone on the outer thigh, just behind the knee and just in front of the ankle joint. No one is immune to poor posture habits. Sitting at the computer terminal, driving a car, watching television, standing in line or walking down the street are just a few examples that we all do on a routine basis.

Toward the end of the day, when our muscles get fatigued, we tend to slouch. Our head leans forward, we round at the shoulders and we sink ever so deeply into our chairs, bowing out the lower back.

So what can the average person do to help their posture? Good posture and postural sense is a habit, so developing and maintaining good posture takes time and practice. Start off by finding what it feels like to have your head, shoulders and lower back in proper alignment as mentioned above.

This may feel very awkward and stiff or upright. It may even feel uncomfortable. This is because your postural muscles have become use to their slouched positions. Try to maintain this posture for five minutes at least ten times a day. Get several post-it notes and put the letter "P" on them. Post these at several locations throughout your home or work space. Whenever you see these notes, adjust your posture. Doing this numerous times during the day will remind your muscles of the correct position and before long, they will naturally attain that posture.

Exercise can also help correct poor posture habits. With poor posture, your upper back and shoulder muscles become weakened, and your chest or pectoral muscles become tight. To stretch the upper chest muscles, lean in to the doorway or corner with arms held out to the sides at ninety degrees. You should feel a gentle stretch it the front of the shoulders and into the chest muscles.

Rowing exercises help to strengthen the muscles of the shoulder blade and the upper back. The easiest way to do this is to do a shoulder blade squeeze. Place both elbows at your side with them bent at ninety degrees. Pull your elbow back, squeezing your shoulders blades together in the back. Hold five seconds.

This exercise is very easy to do and should be done at least ten times per day. Rowing exercises with weights can further strengthen these muscles.

Developing good postural habits takes time and effort. Having good posture can eliminate many aches and pains, and improve appearance. And the next time your mother tells you to sit up straight. Just do it.

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Dallas Times Herald, 10/1991