

POSTURE!

Posture is the way one holds oneself at ALL times, it is not a static state but a dynamic one. It relates to the position of body parts to one-another at all times. Initially good posture often feels abnormal and difficult to most people out of the habit, but with practice it will become easier until just like your present posture it will be subconscious.

Good posture is one that puts the minimal amount of strains and stresses through the body. The bone's shape, the ligaments attaching them together, muscles acting on them, consciously and habitually maintains ones posture.

The way to put minimum amount of stresses and strains through the joints is by keeping them in their 'neutral' position. This neutral position is predetermined by genetics, hence does vary slightly. A slight deviation from the perfect alignment of joints is not considered a problem by most clinicians as it is not normally symptomatic, however gross deviations from the normal alignment, especially if sustained needs to be addressed because it will cause problems.

One should note however, that joints should not be kept in their neutral position at all times as this itself will cause pain, they do need to be moved through their full range of movement to prevent them from getting stiff.

In the spine the way to keep good posture is to ensure that the curves are maintained, while going about your normal everyday activities.

The correct posture in **standing** should be a straight line from behind, with the curves present from the side. Imagine if you drop a plum line down from the ear lobe, it should pass through the point of the shoulder, down through the hip, just behind your kneecap and in front of the ankle. Try and stand tall, with shoulders relaxed back and down, and with bottom and stomach tucked gently in. Both too little curves in the back (flat back) and too larger curves can lead to pain.

For the correct posture in **sitting** refer to the leaflet "How to sit correctly" (downloadable from http://www.asd.co.uk/guides/how_to_posters.htm). Avoid slumping in the chair, as this will always bend the low back in the opposite direction to the one it is meant to be maintained in, and cause the head to poke forward hence increasing the neck curve.

The correct posture in **lying** should again maintain the spinal curves. This is determined by how you lie in bed, how many pillows you use and the bed itself. However when getting into bed one should sit on the edge of the bed, lower oneself onto ones side using your hand and swing your legs up at the same time, then roll over onto your back and straighten legs. Do the reverse to get up in the morning.

POSTURE IN ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

As we have learnt, poor posture can provide strain on your back and lead to pain. Sitting and standing up straight may initially seem a little strange or even unnatural. This is because we tend to slouch when relaxing, therefore, poor posture can become habitual and feel natural. By thinking about how you use your back in everyday life, you learn better habits which can help your back pain and may help you avoid it in the future.

It is important to have a good back and neck posture whenever you are doing everyday activities. Keeping a good posture and maintaining the natural curves in your back and neck will enable you to carry on with daily life in ways that will put less stress on your back. The aim is to help you take control of your body and carry out normal activities.

Here are some common difficulties and solutions to help with posture in everyday activities:

Kitchen

- Washing up – place a second bowl upside down under the top one if the sink is too deep or too low **or** stand the bowl on the draining board and fill. Stand close to the sink to avoid stooping. Open the cupboard door underneath the sink and put a foot up on the bottom of the cupboard to help ease back strain and get closer to the washing up. Bottom of bowl should be at wrist level/able to put palms of hand in bottom of bowl
- Filling and lifting kettle – take jugs of water to the kettle
- Lifting full pots and pans – use a vegetable basket inside the pan when cooking so vegetables can be lifted out removing some of the weight, making the pan easier to lift
- Work surfaces – should be high enough to avoid bending over-if surface can't be raised sit down
- Storage – keep items used the most like food, pots and pans within easy reach at waist height
- Try sitting on a high stool when cooking, preparing food or washing up
- Use your feet for closing low drawers and cupboards
- Never twist and bend at the same time. Always bend your knees, not your back when using an oven or the fridge/freezer
- Cooker – low power squat/go in at an angle
- Washing machine – try kneeling on a cushion to take washing out of the machine-put a low chair or stool beside the machine as a good point of transfer. When hanging out, keep a chair by the line to rest the basket on

and pegs close to hand-avoid repetitive movements. Don't carry a laundry basket full of clothes

Lounge

- Ironing – pace it (10mins a day) ironing surfaces should be high enough to avoid stooping. Also important not to be too high because having the arms continually raised imposes strain on the shoulder, neck and upper back
Stand close to the board as possible with one foot slightly forward or on a Raised small box
Use your bodyweight and sway from one foot to the other as you move
The iron sideways over the garment
Keep clothes on a stool at the side of the board to save bending
Use a high stool to perch or sit down for at least some of it-change your position from sitting to standing
Use a steam iron if possible-requires less pressure
Stand at an angle-keeps your back straighter
Avoid twisting
Can you keep the boards up-save the effort of putting up and down?
- Hoovering – Pace (one room a day)
Upright hoovers tend to be heavier to use and can cause you to twist but better at picking up dust
Cylinder hoovers are usually lighter to use and you can buy an extension pole to make the handle longer. Can do some of the hovering on your knees.
Anchor to hip-use power of legs and step in to it, walking with the hoover.
Move the whole body forwards and backwards with the sweeping action
Don't stoop, keep back straight and avoid twisting movements
Consider a carpet sweeper. They are often light and easy to use. Some people keep one upstairs to avoid carrying the hoover up and down the stairs
Use long handled equipment such as a mop for cleaning the floor
- Polishing/dusting – Pace (one room a day)
Use a feather duster to minimize reaching
Do not stretch to high things, climb on a stool or chair

Bedroom

- Bed making – don't bend or stretch over bed, make the bed on your knees instead,
Consider using fitted sheets that are easier to use and involve less bending and lifting
Feed duvet cover into corners and peg

- Make sure you can get round both sides of the bed
- Dressing – Early morning joint stiffness is a common problem for people with chronic pain:
Have a bath or shower first to ease stiffness
Always bring your leg/foot up towards you-avoid bending forward
When dressing lower half-place painful/stiff leg in first
When undressing-take painful/stiff leg out first
Sit in a chair to dress
Do not bend forward when you put your shoes/socks on-bring foot up towards you and rest on a small stool, table or chair or across your other leg
 - Getting out of bed – roll onto side, push up to a sitting position with arms as legs descend to floor

Bathroom

- Shaving (men) don't stoop or bend forward-sit on a stool or toilet
- Cleaning teeth – sit on the toilet or a stool close to the sink
- Bathing – Sitting in the bath with your legs out straight is not recommended because it can make your back and leg pain worse-try sitting with your legs slightly bent or kneel in the bath
Try letting the water out before getting out
Move from sitting in the bath to kneeling and then getting out
- Showering – Use a stool or chair if difficulty standing
- Washing hair – Back straight in the bath and use a jug or hand held shower head or shower instead
Don't stand and bend over the sink or bath because this increases back pain and strain
Have one foot up on the side of the bath and lean onto knee and use shower head
- Cleaning the bath – kneel at an angle to the bath-use long handled sponge to minimize bending

Shopping

Pace-do several small trips

Always remember to lift, bend and carry correctly

Do not carry all the weight in one hand-distribute the weight evenly between two bags whatever you are carrying

If you have a neck problem-consider a rucksack

A shopping trolley may be useful but can be difficult to get up and down curves, in/out of cars and buses

Try to use supermarket trolleys that have the base at a higher level-help you to avoid bending in the trolley

Looking after children

While dressing/undressing-stand child on a chair or bed to avoid stooping
Kneel while washing your child in the bath
Let them climb out of the bath onto a chair to be dried
Wash, change and dress baby on a table with everything to hand
Bend your knees rather than your back to lift your child

Driving

Pace – try and stop on long journeys to change your position
Make sure your back is well supported and you are sitting upright and straight

Gardening

Long handled tools are available
Avoid digging in most cases
Mowing-an electric lawn mower is the lightest and avoids bending to start it

Using a Computer/Mouse

Refer to the leaflets on “The Ideal Posture” and “Using a Mouse”, which are downloadable from : http://www.asd.co.uk/guides/how_to_posters.htm

Hints to help with posture in daily tasks

- Get close to the task or object
- Use long handled equipment
- Avoid extreme of range in bending, twisting and reaching
- If the surfaces are too low, raise or if too high, can you be raised
- Avoid repetitive movements-twisting when ironing
- Bend by using your legs not your back
- Sitting on a chair may help when reaching low items while you build up your leg muscles
- Can you arrange your environment to encourage good posture
- Put heavier objects used more frequently at an easily accessible height
- Only work at improving your posture in a couple of tasks at a time. Try putting a sticker on the object, or similar to help you to remember your posture
- Pace yourself-think little and often
- Ask yourself if you could change the equipment you are using to make it easier
- If an activity is still difficult to do, think about changing the way that you usually do it

- To change a habit got to stop and think-adjust yourself to your environment
- Twisting/bending-worst movements rotating discs
- Key central point – pelvis and hips
- Can't change your posture too quickly
- Avoid extremes of range-bending, reaching, repetition, holding-remember to step round rather than bend/twist
- Think about task first rather than doing automatically