Practical tips for improving your posture

In this article, you will:

- Learn about posture
- Discover how bad posture can cause back, shoulder and neck pain
- Find tips to improve your posture

Experiencing pain in the back, shoulder and neck is common. This typically occurs on waking, after a long drive or a stressful day at the office. Something we do every day may suddenly hurt. When we complain, we are often told to 'improve our posture'.

But what is posture?

Posture describes the position of our bodies when we stand, sit or lie down. The theory is that good posture evenly distributes the forces applied across joints and muscles. If the spine is aligned, weight is carried equally across each vertebral joint. Too much weight on one side can lead to injury and make it harder for organs such as our lungs to work properly. Ideally, all joints and muscles should rest in a neutral, non-stressed, symmetrical position. Good posture also looks good!

What causes bad posture?

Our sedentary lifestyle and occupational demands are major contributors. Slouching at a desk, sleeping in the wrong position, putting more weight on one leg while standing, and cradling the phone between ear and shoulder all effect our posture. Even constantly looking down at an angle at our smart phones and tablets may cause damage to our spines. This has been referred to as 'Text neck'. The longer we go without fixing bad posture, the more severe these problems can become.

How can I improve my posture?

By acknowledging what you are doing wrong and making the following adjustments to your posture and movements.

- For those with desk jobs, it is common to hunch the shoulders, curve the back and bend forward at the hips. This can be adjusted by tilting the chair backwards thereby, reducing bending at the hips while keeping the the lower, middle and upper back supported. Pulling the shoulders and thoracic spine back and at the same time keeping the neck relaxed is also advised. Ideally, the knees shouldn't extend ahead of the toes and both feet should be slightly elevated on a footrest.
- When standing, place your feet shoulder width apart and pull your shoulders back. Distribute your weight evenly between the balls of both feet. With your knees slightly bent, pull in your stomach and keep your neck and spine aligned. This won't just improve your posture but will make you look taller and more confident!
- An ideal mattress should provide even and reasonably firm support for your back, neck and head when you sleep. Best positions for a neutral spine are either lying on your side, with knees and hips gently bent up towards your chest or on your back.

Bad posture does not develop overnight. If you look after children, it is worth encouraging them to develop a good posture from an early age. Taking part in a sport, getting up from the desk every two

hours, taking the stairs instead of the elevator and avoiding a sedentary lifestyle will contribute to good posture and better health.

Bad posture brings back pain   Sit straight, shoulders back, feet supported, look down at screen slightly and hands/forearms level with keyboard