

Posture Advice

Service User Information Leaflet

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Posture

If you have ever had back or neck pain you may have been told that it is important to be aware of your posture. Any leaflet, magazine or TV show that has a “healthy spine” theme will mention “good posture” and its role in keeping your spine fit and healthy.

You may have been given exercises to help improve your posture. Some of you may even be going to classes where the instructor talks about the importance of good posture and spinal alignment e.g. pilates, tai chi or yoga.

So what is Posture?

- Posture is the position in which you hold your body while sitting, standing or even lying down.
- The principles of good posture are based on what we know about the mechanics of the spine.
- Our spine is not a straight structure but is curved to give a shallow S-shape as shown:



- When we stand or sit with these curves in place, the joints and soft tissues (muscles and ligaments) are in what is called a “**neutral position**”.

What do you need for good posture?

- Normal movement in the joints of the spine.
- Muscle flexibility.
- Good postural muscle tone.
- Muscle balance on both sides of the spine and their ability to contract and relax.
- Self awareness of your own posture is the hardest part of all whilst sitting and standing. You need to make corrections and adjustments throughout the day.

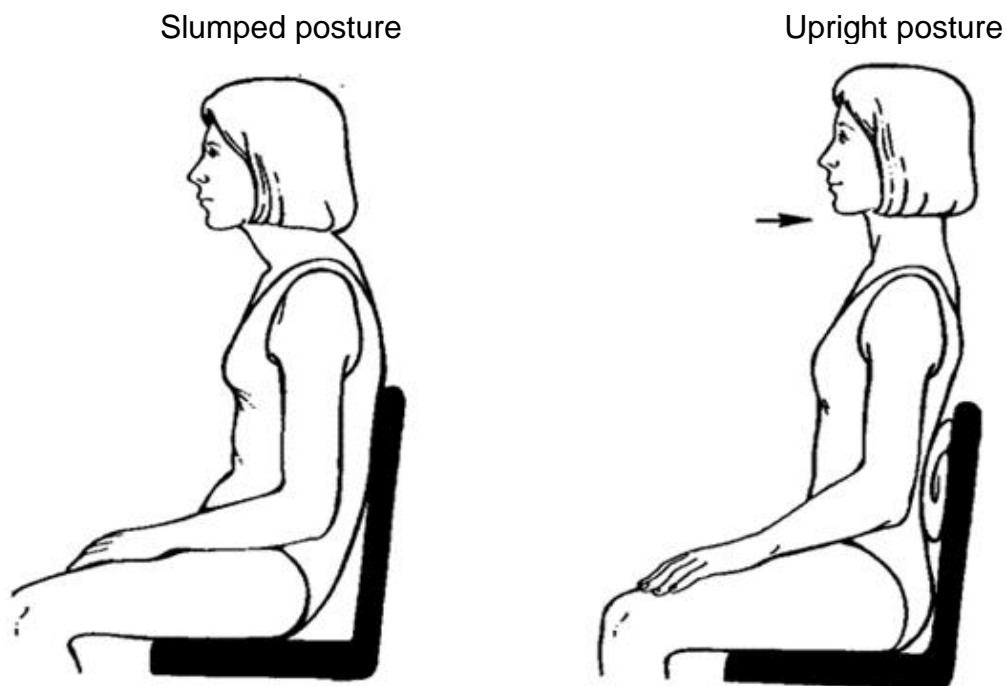
The spine needs **movement** to encourage blood flow through the soft tissues (muscles and ligaments) and it also helps with the nutrition of the discs of the spine. Movement is produced by a combination of muscles contracting and relaxing.

Your postural muscles are designed to be on duty all day and every day. You must therefore practise using them 'little and often' throughout the day and this will strengthen them.

You can use prompts such as sticky dots on a kitchen cupboard/mirror, or use an alarm on your phone/computer to help remind you to move and get up when adverts come on television.

We need to think about our posture in all daily activities.

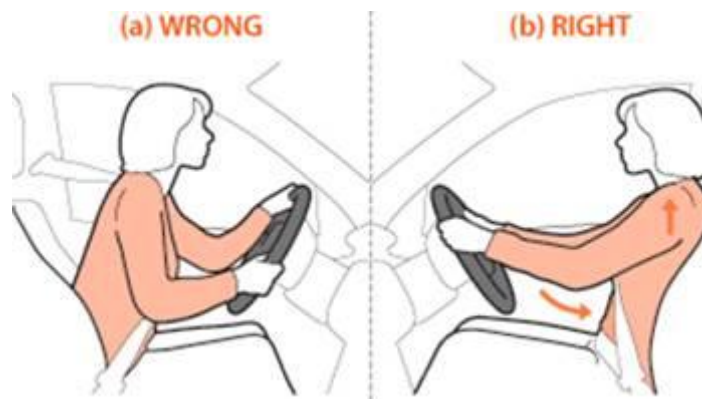
Sitting.



- Your body may respond to different positions depending on your pain and anatomy. Try different positions and regular movements to keep comfortable.

- The spine can be supported with a cushion or rolled up towel, placed in the small of your back, if required. Products such as 'lumbar rolls' can also be used.
- Take regular breaks. Avoid sitting in the same position for longer than 20 to 30 minutes. If you need to sit longer transfer your weight from side to side or do some pelvic tilting forwards and back.
- Remember the spine likes movement. Fidgeting is good.

When driving.



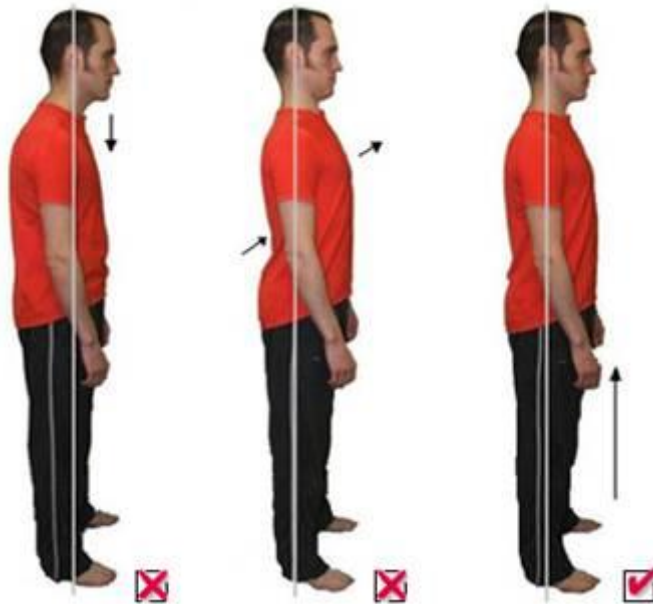
- Pain in the spine may occur while driving due to poor position and/or because you are stuck in the same position for long periods.

Ways to improve your driving position:

- The back rest should come to shoulder height and be wide enough to support your shoulders.
- Make sure the seat is not too long, or too short to avoid pressure behind your knee.
- The seat should be wider than your hips and thighs.
- Make sure your feet can reach the pedals without stretching.
- Experiment with different seat incline positions to find a comfortable positions.
- Remember the spine likes movement. Pelvic tilting either side to side or forwards and backwards can help shift the pressure through the spine or improve the blood flow to the muscles.

When standing.

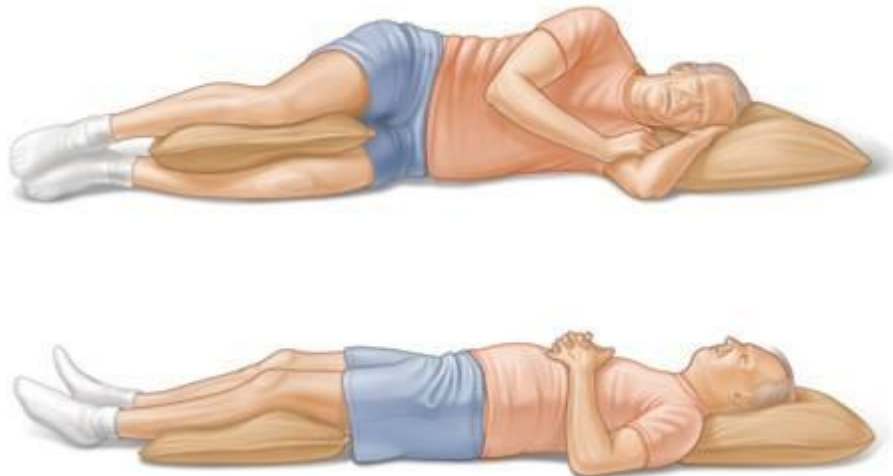
Think 'spine in line'. Imagine a plumb line with your shoulders, hips, knees and ankles directly one above the other.



Ways to improve your standing position:

- Try to get your ears in line with your shoulders and avoid your chin poking forward.
- Tuck the chin in a little to keep the head level. Shoulders should be held back in a relaxed posture.
- Avoid slouching forward or over arching in the lower back.
- Gently draw your lower tummy in (below your belly button).
- Keep the knees slightly bent. Try not to lock them back.
- Weight equally through both feet.
- If carrying a rucksack make sure to have both straps on your shoulders to evenly distribute the weight.

When Lying.



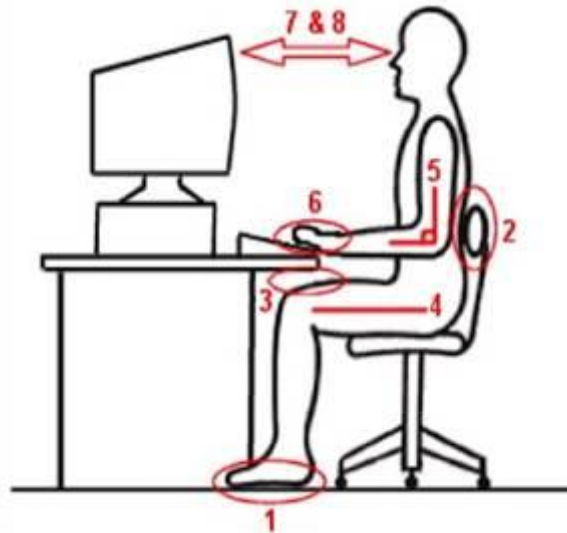
Ways to improve your lying position:

- Use as many pillows as necessary to fill the gap between the head/neck and the bed. This helps to keep the head and neck in line with the rest of the spine.
- In side lying a pillow between the knees helps to keep the hip and back level.

Points to consider:

- By improving your position you can improve the support of your spine and the soft tissue structures.
- It is good to work on improving the positions you use most of the time eg when standing in a queue or preparing a meal, or while sitting watching television, eating, sitting at computer.
- Practise little and often. Use prompts such as sticky labels or red dots on mirrors, kettle or steering wheel. You can also set alarms on your computer at work or telephone.
- While it is important to work on good posture don't forget the spine needs to move in **all directions** to be healthy.

When sitting at computer or work station



1. Feet are fully supported by the floor or a foot rest may be used if desk height is not adjustable.
2. Back is supported with chair or appropriate lumbar support.
3. Knees are at same height as hips or slightly lower than the hips.
4. Thighs and hips are supported by a well padded seat and parallel to the floor.
5. Shoulders are relaxed and elbows stay in close to body, bent at approx 90 degrees.
6. Seat height should be adjusted so wrists and forearms are straight, in a neutral position and roughly parallel to the floor. Keyboard sits under fingers.
7. Top of the screen should be at or slightly below eye level.
8. Head is level and generally in-line with the torso.

Regardless of how good your working posture is, sitting still for prolonged periods is not healthy. You should change your position frequently throughout the day in the following ways:

- Stretch fingers, hands, arms and torso.
- Stand up and walk about every 20-30 minutes.

Useful Information

General Musculoskeletal Advice

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints>

Advice on Work

For free and confidential advice about work call the Healthy Working Lives Adviceline on 0800 019 2211 or www.healthyworkinglives.com

Backcare

www.backcare.org.uk

Understanding Pain Overview

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b8oB757DKc>

Physical Activity Advice

www.healthscotland.com/physical-activity.aspx

Physical Activity Health Benefits

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUaInS6HIGo>