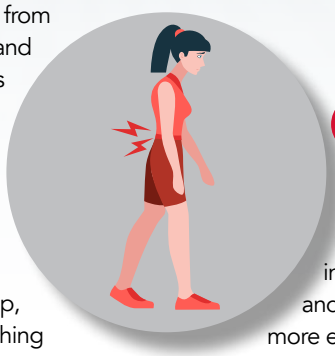
12 Benefits of Good Posture

The benefits of a good posture go way beyond the vanity of 'looking good'. From your pain levels to your self-confidence, your posture impacts more than you think. Putting in the effort to improve your posture offers huge payoffs.

1 REDUCED LOW BACK PAIN

Sitting or standing in a slouched position for prolonged periods of time stresses your lower back. More specifically, it puts pressure on the structures of the spine, including the intervertebral discs, facet points (the small contact points where each individual vertebra meets the one above and below), and the surrounding ligaments and muscles.

Moving around frequently, every 20-30 minutes, will prevent you from adopting poor postures and imposing abnormal loads on your back. Regular exercise and specific strengthening of your core and gluteus (buttock) muscles will help. In addition, changing your desk set up, and avoiding hours slouching on the couch will reduce your lower back pain.



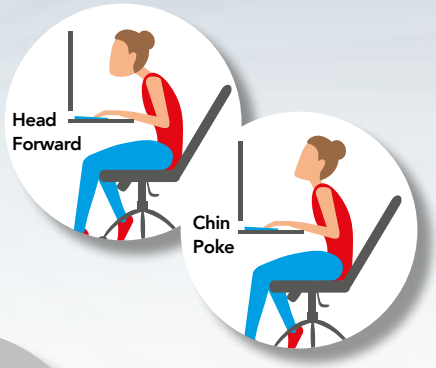
2 FEWER HEADACHES

Poor posture can contribute to tension and cervicogenic headaches, due to increased muscle tension in the back of the neck. Often if you correct your posture, you can reduce muscle tension and reduce the risk of suffering from headaches.

A stretching programme to ease tight muscles can reduce headaches, and physical therapy with manual techniques, massage and even dry needling can reduce muscle spasm.

Exercises to strengthen the deep flexor muscles on the front of your neck will improve your neck posture and reduce the load on your neck muscles and joints causing the pain.

Being conscious of a 'head forward' or 'poking chin' posture, which we adapt with prolonged computer work and excessive smartphone use.



3 INCREASED ENERGY LEVELS

When your bones and joints are in correct alignment, it allows the muscles to be used as they were intended, so you'll have less fatigue and more energy as the muscles work more efficiently.

There are different types of muscles: slow twitch muscles, like postural muscles, designed to contract at a low intensity but that can work for hours, which is just what you need all day when you're standing or sitting; and fast twitch muscles, or prime movers, designed to contract with greater force and effect, to generate movement.





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Fast twitch muscles however, can only work for very short periods of time. Think of muscles like the biceps in the arms and quadriceps at the front of the thigh – they (respectively) flex and lift things, or help you to jump and climb stairs in short bursts.

What happens with poor posture and weak postural muscles is that the fast twitch, prime movers take over – but they battle to keep working all day and fatigue sets in causing muscle spasm, tightness and pain.

It's a bit like asking a Formula 1 car to deliver a 40 tonne load to northern Alaska in the middle of winter. It's just not designed to do it.

Slow and steady wins the posture race. Good posture, and exercising for good posture will ensure the correct muscles are recruited for what they were intended.

4 LESS TENSION IN YOUR SHOULDERS AND NECK

A 'forward head' posture puts strain on the upper back, shoulder, and neck areas. With proper alignment, the joints and ligaments are less stressed and less subject to chronic overuse. A 'poking chin' or 'forward head' posture can increase loads on the cervical spine (the neck area) from 10lbs with good posture to up to 60lbs with bad posture.

This can:

- damage the intervertebral discs (shock absorbers)
- strain ligaments causing inflammation and pain
- cause early onset arthritis
- form bony spurs on the vertebra
- trap nerves which cause referred pain in the arms and chest area.

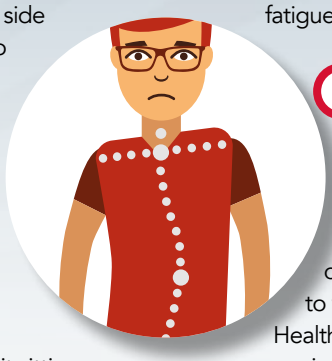
The posture causes disuse of certain muscles which become weak and lengthened, whereas others are overused resulting in spasm, pain and shortening. All of this compounds the problem and contributes to pain and stiffness in the neck, upper back and shoulders.

Specific stretches and strengthening exercises can help correct this. Physical therapy, massage, dry needling, taping, and manual mobilisation of the cervical joints will all contribute to reducing the tension and pain and improving your posture.

Your therapist or human resources department can also advise you on setting up your desk or workspace correctly to avoid a forward head posture. It's also a good idea to set reminders on your calendar to check in with yourself several times throughout the day, and ensure your ears are above your shoulders and that you're using your front neck muscles – not just your muscles at the back of your neck – to hold your head up.

5 DECREASED RISK OF ABNORMAL WEARING OF THE JOINT SURFACES

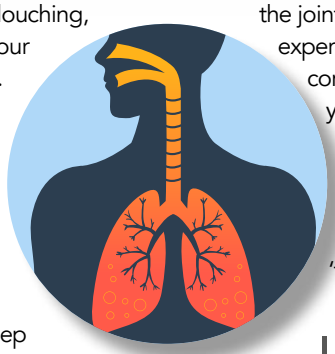
Crooked sitting and standing, such as resting on one leg or side of your body, leads to hip strain. Your joints wear down naturally over time. If your posture is even, not as many problems arise, but if you're uneven, more pain and issues tend to occur.



Poor posture, be it sitting or standing, means your body is not in ideal alignment resulting in uneven distribution of loads through your joints. Your ligaments and supporting muscles are not made to withstand such strains and injury can result. Over time the cartilage in the joint surfaces wears unevenly resulting in pain and inflammation possibly the development of osteoarthritis.

6 INCREASED LUNG CAPACITY

Simply put, if you're slouching, you're compressing your lungs and diaphragm. If you're sitting and standing taller, your lungs have more space to expand.



Try this, hunch right over and curl your shoulders in, now try and take a deep breath? Did you feel like you inhaled a large volume of air? Probably not. Poor posture, with an increased thoracic (upper back) kyphosis (an increased outward curve of the spine), makes it very hard for your lungs to fully expand as your rib cage can't expand.

Added to this a hunched posture often results in a 'forward head' posture and rounded shoulders – all of which make it harder to 'open' up the front of your chest and take a deep breath in.

Exercises to strengthen your upper back and shoulder blade muscles can help correct a hunched over posture. Stretches to encourage extension of your upper back and stretches to open up the front of your chest (your pectoral muscles) can help increase lung capacity.

This is critical for general health and physical activity capacity. Basically, the better you breathe the more oxygen your body has, and the more energy and less fatigued you will feel.

7 IMPROVED CIRCULATION AND DIGESTION

If you're compressing vital organs around your chest and abdomen, your circulation is poor, and those organs aren't going to work as well.

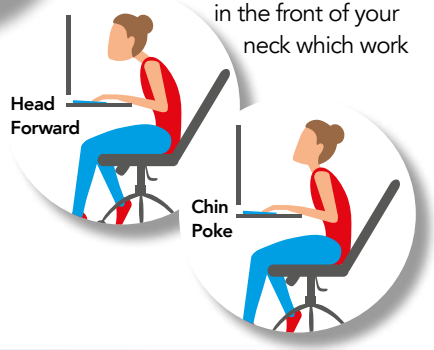


Healthy blood flow requires proper alignment and avoiding positions which cramp circulation, like crossing your legs, slouching, hunching forward.

8 REDUCED TMJ (TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT) PAIN

When we have a 'forward head' position, the joints in your jaw and your jaw muscles experience stress and tension. This can contribute to pain with eating, talking, yawning, headaches and clicking when you chew or open your mouth.

Correcting your neck posture and avoiding a 'poking chin' or 'forward head' position will reduce the strain on the muscles in the front of your neck which work



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with your jaw. If you are stressed and concentrating hard for hours in front of a computer or even gaming, you may find you also clench your jaw.

Get help to adjust your ergonomics at work and at home to support a better posture. This could include purchasing a better chair, desk or changing the height of your computer. You could use a sit-to-stand desk for example.

Releasing the tension in your neck and upper shoulders should reduce the effects of jaw pain which can be achieved with physical therapy. Focus on relaxing your jaw throughout the day, especially in high-stress situations like driving during rush hour.

9 IMPROVED CORE AND SCAPULAR STRENGTH

Muscular effort is required to maintain good posture. If you're holding a good posture, your core and upper back muscles will remain active and engaged. As described above under point 3, you want to strengthen and improve the endurance of your postural muscles. By having a good posture you are engaging your postural muscles and freeing up your prime mover muscles to simply chill, or work on more demanding tasks.

Having a stronger core and scapular (shoulder blade) position, not only gives you better posture but provides the foundations for all movements around the trunk and limbs. So if you want to bowl better at cricket or serve faster at tennis, a stronger scapular is key to that.

Likewise a strong core makes your lower back and pelvis the power house for any activity or sport involving twisting, jumping, running, cycling, rowing, and skiing for example.

Your physical therapist can correctly teach you how to engage your core from simple mat work floor exercises to using these muscles while doing functional daily chores or sports activities.



10 REDUCED RISK OF FALLS



A stronger core from better posture allows your body to be better aligned and have better balance. This in turn can make you more stable and responsive on your feet reducing your chance of a fall and possible injury.

11 BETTER FORM DURING YOUR WORKOUTS



Your posture doesn't just affect you when you're sitting and standing, but when you're exercising, too. For example, having an engaged core and neutral spine during a squat will help prevent injury. With any sport, or daily activities, be it hanging washing on a line or lifting heavy groceries and children, performing them with your body in the correct alignment, and with the right muscles available to help do the chore, prevents undue stress and strain.



12 INCREASED SELF CONFIDENCE

Not only can good posture boost your energy levels and reduce your pain, it can also increase your self-esteem. Studies have reported good posture gives you more confidence in your thoughts.

Before a meeting, presentation, or job interview, make sure your shoulders are relaxed, your spine is in alignment, and your ears are resting over your shoulders. Feeling more confident in yourself can start from day one. Simply pay attention to your posture as you enter a room, sit down to a meal, or work on a project at your computer.



13 BONUS APPEAR TALLER (AND THINNER)

While it's icing on the cake, good posture can make you more attractive. People look taller and slimmer when they have good posture. Sometimes it can even make your abdominals appear more defined. What's not to like about that?

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