

**H**ow you hold your body in space is your posture. Your posture is a direct result of the postural habits that you commonly exhibit. You can choose to hold good posture or poor posture, either way gravity is your worst enemy whilst standing or sitting.

Standing with good posture looks and feels fantastic, plus it's very healthy for your joints, muscles, bones, blood circulation and most importantly, your self-esteem. That's why proud and confident people stand tall with excellent posture. It's a habit.

The good news for you is that you can quite easily change your postural habits and train your body. Standing tall with good posture may be really awkward and strain your muscles initially, resulting in fatigue. But over time your body can adjust and muscles strengthen (with the help of some exercises) so it's not a strain, nor does it require conscious thought. Good posture also places the least strain upon your supporting muscles and ligaments so ultimately it will help prevent pain in the future.

The benefits of good posture include:

- Prevention of postural muscle fatigue
- Correctly aligned joints and bones to encourage efficient muscle activity
- Minimal joint stress
- Avoiding excessive loads on joints and ligaments
- Prevention of back and neck pain, muscular pain and headaches
- Contribution to your enhanced confidence and a good appearance.

The biggest cause of musculoskeletal disorders is putting your body in an awkward posture for an extended period of time. Awkward posture puts unnecessary strain on your joints, inhibits their mobility and creates muscle imbalances.

### EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT, WHAT DOES YOUR POSTURE LOOK LIKE?



# Stand Tall

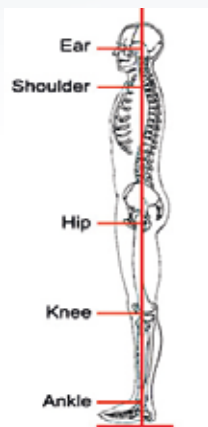


and hips level with each other. Is your spine straight or making a S bend. Are your knees 'kissing' each other or is one leg and foot rotated out like a duck? Your body is one interconnected organism. If your feet and hips are out of line, then your back and shoulders will be thrown out too, and vice versa.



### HOW TO CHECK YOUR STANDING POSTURE

Stand against a wall with your shoulders and bottom touching the wall. The rear of your head should lightly touch the wall. Or, there should be less than 2 inches between your neck and the wall and your back and the wall.



Hard to see or judge by yourself? Have your partner or friend take a photo of you in your underwear from the front, back and the side. This way you can actually see your own posture. You can even draw a vertical line down the side of your body like the image above.

An ideal posture would have your earlobes in line with your shoulder, your shoulder in line with the middle of your hip, the line passing just to the front of the middle of your knee and then down through the middle of the ankle bone.

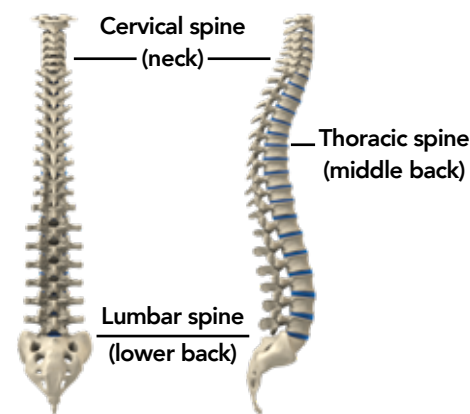
Did you nail that? If you did then your posture is correctly supporting the three natural curves of your spine: one at your neck (your cervical spine), another in your mid-back (your thoracic spine), and another in your lower back (your lumbar spine). The idea isn't to stretch yourself out, but to stand in an upright way that puts the least stress on those curves as possible.

Remember to look at your alignment from the front and back. Are your shoulders

### HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR STANDING POSTURE

The number one tip to achieve a great standing posture is to simply 'stand tall'. All the muscles that you need to push you taller are the same ones that improve your posture.

- Stand tall
- Extend your head directly up (think balloon lifting your head with a string in the top of your skull) - but keep your chin tucked in. Avoid tilting your head forward, backward or sideways.
- Your earlobes will line up with the middle of your shoulders
- Keep your shoulders back, your knees straight and your back straight
- Let arms hang naturally down the sides of your body
- Lightly draw in your core stomach



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muscles, by squeezing your belly button closer to your spine at the same time as lifting your lady bits (or man bits) up towards your belly button (this will need lots of practice, possibly help from a physical therapist to understand how these muscles function).

- Avoid locking the knees, keep them soft
- Ensure your feet arches are in a neutral (not flat) position
- Stand with weight over the centre of your feet
- Stand with your feet slightly apart (shoulder-width)
- When standing for sustained periods, shift your weight from one foot to the other, or stand in a walk stand position and rock your weight from your front to back foot.

If you experience discomfort, or find it hard to stand in the ideal posture, you may have some restriction of joint, ligament or muscular movement. All of these problems can be assessed and improved by your physical therapist.

You may have adopted this posture many years ago and this has become 'your norm.' It's not to say your position is right or wrong but the closer you aim for the ideal postural alignment the less likely you are to suffer from pain now or in the future.

## HOW CAN PHYSICAL THERAPY HELP?

It may not have been that hard to adjust yourself in the mirror and stand 'correctly'. But can you hold that position all day, and maintain a good posture whilst walking, doing chores, at work, or playing with the children? Like starting anything new it always feels a little foreign. For example, when you join a gym class – the first few days are hell, you are stiff and sore, you definitely don't see or feel the benefit for a couple weeks. But eventually that initial discomfort settles and you soldier through doing things you thought previously impossible. Your body has an amazing ability to adapt and grow in strength and endurance. Muscle memory also allows for repetition, repetition, repetition to become the new norm.

Good posture can be retrained with the use of postural exercises and in some cases the help of posture braces, or posture support.

**1** Exercise therapy is the key to strengthening weak muscles and stretching out short tight muscles. Poor posture results in muscle imbalances - weakness from disuse or bad joint alignment causes muscles to shorten and become tight or in spasm. Although there are some basic exercises for posture most people will need some specific attention depending on their own postural habits.

**2** Bracing or support may be beneficial in more severe cases where constant feedback and reminding are necessary. Posture braces can address poor control in the lower back or in the mid to upper back and shoulders during the initial phase when you have no or little postural awareness. As your posture improves through exercise, you can transition from a heavy to lower support posture brace. Further weaning to kinesiology postural taping may be taken to help achieve the final transition to perfect posture. There are many braces for sale, even at your local pharmacy or online, however these are a passive solution and must not be seen as a quick fix. You should get advice on bracing from your therapist. It is essential you train and strengthen the correct muscles to be able to hold you in an ideal posture, so that the bracing is simply a temporary assistant in the process.

**3** Standing posture starts at your feet. If you have poor foot posture the sustained stresses and strains will affect your bones and muscles, and impact on the alignment of your knees, hips back and upper back or shoulders. Your physical therapist can assess and prescribe exercises or orthotics should you need them.

**4** There is no real underlying cause for poor posture, it is normally habitual. So being conscious of good posture throughout the day will help. However, things that contribute may

include a shoulder or back injury and ankle or knee pain that is affecting how you are able to hold your body. How you use your body through the day affects your posture – sitting at computers, slouching at desks, driving, lifting heavy loads, can all affect posture. Your physical therapist is key in rehabilitating any underlying injury, or guiding you through changes that can be made in daily life to better your posture.

Standing comfortably with good posture should feel natural and energy efficient. The good news is that if you keep at maintaining a good posture your body will quickly adapt and you'll feel more comfortable and strong in your 'new normal' posture. Remember, no one posture is good to maintain all day. As a human, you were designed to move from posture to posture to avoid muscle fatigue and abnormal sustained tissue loading. This means that your best posture is your next posture.



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