

Rehab Advice

Posture and correct body mechanics

Posture

Good posture is important for good health. If you have good posture it ensures your back and neck joints stay healthy, you can breathe freely and your internal organs work more efficiently. There are many things that affect posture:

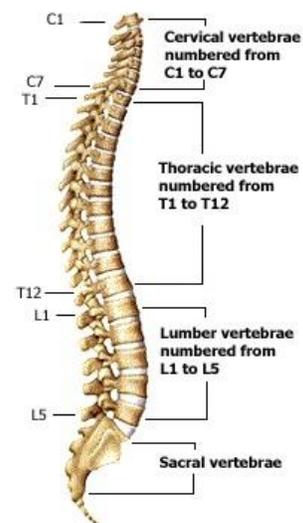
- **Bad habits such as slouching**
- **Stiff joints and weak muscles**
- **Poor level of physical (aerobic) fitness**
- **Lifting and handling incorrectly**
- **Stress and anxiety**
- **Fatigue**
- **Obesity**
- **Poor general health** - a bad diet, smoking or too much alcohol

It is important to remember that daily stresses cause stiffness and weakness that build up slowly over months or years. This may eventually catch up with you, with the possibility you will develop an aching back and neck and tension in your shoulders. A high level of physical fitness and using your body correctly will help you to stay fit.

What is good posture?

From the back, your spine is straight; from the side it has three natural curves, an inward curve in your neck, an outward curve in your thorax and an inward curve in your low back.

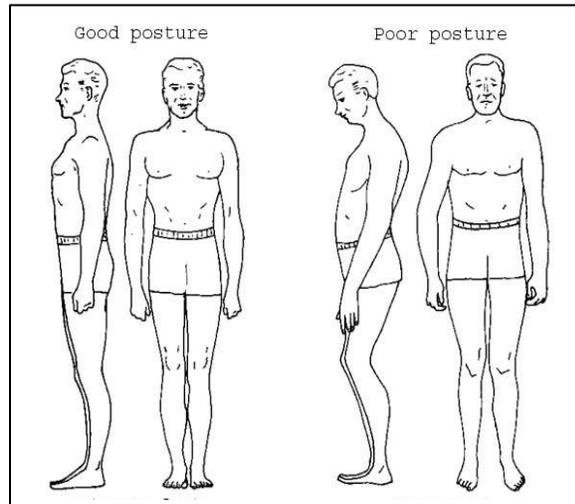
You must have these three natural curves for a healthy spine.



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People who spend a lot of time bending or sitting often lose the inward curve in their low back. People who have weak muscles or very mobile joints can develop too large a curve in the low back. This often happens during pregnancy and after childbirth. People who stoop can get too much curve in their thorax.

Poor posture such as bending and slouching when sitting can lead to problems over time.



It is important that you sit correctly

Correct sitting means that your spine is in a neutral position with its three natural curves. It is a good idea to use a small rolled towel or cushion to maintain the position of the low back when you are sitting for a long period. It is possible to do this when sitting in the car a sofa or a dining chair as illustrated.



Prolonged forward bending and twisting can cause strain and pain

Prolonged bending for tasks such as doing the gardening or cleaning the bath can put strain on the spinal joints. It is important to practise the principles of correct body mechanics to minimize the strain on your joints.

Stretching backwards after sitting or forward bending reduces the strain and is an important exercise to keep your spine supple and healthy. It is very important to do this exercise if your back feels stiff after bending or sitting.

How to look after your posture

- Avoid prolonged bending, stooping, and twisting.
- Have good posture, particularly when sitting - put your bottom right back in the chair and a cushion in your low back to keep the inward curve.
- Think about how you do lifting and handling tasks. Try to avoid lifting and carrying very heavy weights or for very long distances it is best to get help or to use a trolley.

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- Learn and use correct techniques for lifting and handling loads at all times.
- Maintain a high level of physical fitness.
- Stand up and stretch backwards frequently, whenever you have been sitting or bending.

Lifting and handling

Many people think that lifting and handling will cause harm. This is not true as long as you follow the principles of correct body mechanics. These are:

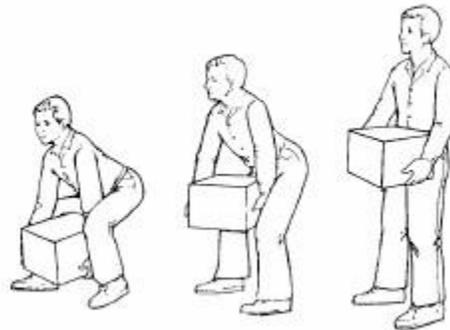
STOP and THINK before any manual handling task and plan the best way to do the task. **Do a one-minute risk assessment**

- **Think TILE (Task, Individual, Load and Environment).** Remember if it does not seem safe **STOP** and consult the documented risk assessment for the task

When lifting, pushing or pulling use the **POWER POSITION**. This is the position sportspeople use to give them power and speed. It will help to protect you as you go about your job.

The power position

- Feet apart
- Hips and knees bent
- Bottom out
- Head up and chest up
- Keep your spine in a neutral position with its 3 natural curves, and stomach braced



Principles of correct body mechanics

There are four key principles of correct body mechanics. You must aim to obey all these principles every time you perform a lifting or moving task.

- **Use your legs**
- **Keep the load close**
- **Keep your spine in a neutral position**
- **Don't twist**

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Test the load - Before lifting or moving an object you should test the load. Squat down and try to slide the object with one hand; a light object will move easily. If it feels heavy with one hand then tentatively try sliding it with both. If it is hard to shift, you should get help or equipment or both. **Always test the load and never lift more than you can safely cope with.**

Plan the move - Check the path of travel and destination of the load to make sure it is clear. Clear the path before lifting the load.

Use a wide, balanced stance with one foot ahead of the other - A solid base of support reduces the likelihood of slipping and jerking movements.

Keep the three natural curves in your back when lifting. Bend at the hips and knees. With the back in neutral, the forces are more evenly distributed on the support structures. This is the **power position**.

Bring the load as close to the body as possible - This keeps your back from acting as the fulcrum and reduces the stress on the joints.

Brace your stomach muscles before you start to lift - This stabilises and protects your spine.

Keep your head and shoulders up as you start to lift - This helps to keep the arch in your lower back.

Lift with your legs and stand up in a smooth, even movement - Use your strong leg and buttock muscles to straighten the knees and hips. This reduces the strain on the low back.

Move your feet if a direction change is necessary - This eliminates the need to twist at the waist and reduces the stress on the supporting structures of the back.

Communicate if two or more individuals are involved in the movement - This reduces the likelihood of an error which could result in sudden or jerking movements.

S T R E T C H to ease the strain

Exercise

Exercise is probably the most important thing you can do to keep your spine healthy and avoid a back problem. Exercise is also important if you already have a back problem in order to help you get better.