

## **BAD POSTURE AND OFFICE ERGONOMICS**

Do you slouch while you work at your desk or walk with a hunched back? Well, the way you carry yourself *[that is your posture]* has a dramatic effect on your health.

When you intentionally or unintentionally repeat poor posture every day, your body's structure slowly changes and adapts to it, resulting in misalignment and pain. While we all may tend to make these mistakes without realizing it, there are a few postural mistakes that can take a toll on your health. Here are five postures that you should know about.

**Remember to always consult a doctor to determine if you are physically capable of performing any suggested exercises.**

**Bad posture #1 (Hunchback):** This is when your back forms a C shape at the top of your spinal column. Your spine is supposed to be straight, but becomes curved at this spot.

**Cause:** Sitting for long hours with bad posture. For instance, sitting hunched over a computer screen.

**Symptoms:** Pain in the neck, shoulder, back

**Complications:** Causes the chest muscles to tighten leading to an excessively curved back in the upper back or thoracic region. The muscles of the upper back loosen and eventually weaken.

**Possible Solutions:**

**Upper back foam rolling** to increase the mobility of your upper back. Lie on a foam roller placed in the middle of your back and perpendicular to the spine. With your face facing upwards, keep your hands behind your head and bend your upper back over the roller five times. You can repeat for each segment of your upper back by adjusting the roller.

**Prone cobra** to strengthen the weak muscles in your back. Lie with your face down, arms at the sides, and palms down. Slowly lift your chest and hands off the floor, and press your shoulder blades together, keeping your chin down. Hold this position for five seconds. Do this ten times. Repeat two to three sets daily. Yoga can help correct your posture too.

## **Bad posture #2 (Rounded Shoulder)**

**Cause:** Sitting with a bad posture while typing or imbalanced exercise regime involving excessive chest muscle workouts.

**Symptoms:** Pain in the neck, shoulder, back

**Complications:** Causes the chest muscles to tighten, causing the shoulders to rotate forward. Apart from that, the muscles of the upper back weaken and loosen.

### **Possible Solutions:**

**Stretching to relax the tight chest muscles:** Place your arm against the wall on the side of a doorway in a high-five position, with your elbow bent 90 degrees. Take a step through the doorway and you will feel a stretch in your chest and the front of your shoulders. Hold position for 30 seconds. Repeat 2 to 3 sets (four times daily).

**Exercise to strengthen the muscle of the back (trapezius):** Lie on the floor, face-down, and place both arms at a 90 degree angle in a high-five position. Maintaining the same angle at the elbow, lift both arms by dragging the shoulders backwards and pressing the shoulder blades towards each other. Hold this position for five seconds. Repeat 2 to 3 sets (four times daily).

**Bad posture #3 (Over-Pronated Feet):** This is where the arch of your feet are flat causing your ankles to bend slightly inwards or outwards depending on your stance.

**Cause:** Pregnancy, obesity or inappropriate footwear can weaken the arch resulting in over-pronation of the foot (and sometimes flat feet).

**Symptoms:** Medial knee pain, hip pain, and low back pain.

**Complications:** Adds pressure on the foot, tightens the calf muscles, and may rotate the knees towards each other. Often results in conditions such as metatarsalgia, heel spurs, plantar fasciitis, and bunions.

### **Possible Solution:**

**The best solution is orthotics** (devices used to correct the alignment); especially if the arch has fallen or you have a 'flat foot'. If the arch is weak, walking or running barefoot may help in strengthening the arches.

**Bad posture #4 (Anterior Pelvic Tilt):** A condition where a person's pelvis tilts forward, pushing his/her torso forward bending the back in an odd position.

**Cause:** Extended periods of sitting, without stretching, which tightens the hip flexors (muscles which allow you to move your thighs up towards your abdomen).

**Symptoms:** Pain in the lower back (this tilt causes your stomach to protrude outwards even though you may not have any belly fat).

**Complications:** Hip flexors tighten and glutes (muscles of the buttock) become weak.

#### **Possible Solutions:**

**Stretch to relax hip flexors:** Kneel on one knee and tighten your gluteal muscles on the leg you are kneeling on. You will feel a stretch in the front part of your hip. Raise the arm on the same kneeling side and stretch towards the opposite direction. Hold this position for 30 seconds, then relax. Repeat four times.

**Exercise to strengthen gluteal muscles:** Lie down on your back and bend your knees to about 90-degrees. Squeeze your gluteal muscles together and push your hip upwards till your body forms a straight line from knees to shoulders. Hold this position for 5 seconds, then relax. Repeat three times (do this 10 times daily).

**Bad posture #5 (Forward Head Cause):** Sitting hunched over in an office chair for long hours, staring at a computer.

**Symptoms:** Pain in the neck

**Complications:** Tightness of the muscles of the back of the neck, along with the muscles of the upper back (levator and upper trapezius).

#### **Possible Solutions:**

**Stretches to loosen tight muscles in the back of the neck:** Perform daily head nods. Move your head, dropping your chin downwards and in towards your neck. This stretches the back of the neck. Hold the position for 5 seconds (repeat 10 times).

**Exercise to strengthen the weak muscles in the front of the neck:** Lie on the floor, face-up, and lift your head up from the floor. Hold this position for five seconds and repeat 10 times.

**Become more aware of your posture and make conscious decisions every day to develop and maintain good posture habits.**