

So, How Good is Your Posture?

Written by Deborah Read

Try this: Stand up and slouch as best you can! Come on, a full and lazy slouch with your back bent, your shoulders rounded and forward, and your head forward and down. Now your arms should be hanging in front of your torso. So, keeping this perfect slouch, try to lift your arms over your head without changing any other parts of your body.



Hard, isn't it?! Much harder than if you stand tall and raise your hands overhead! It takes much more effort to accomplish the same thing when you have good body positioning, or posture.

If you didn't believe earlier that poor posture has a powerfully negative effect on your ability to move and to perform your best, I hope you believe it now!

So many people are working at computers these days. Not only at work, but also at home, and we all know how "ergonomic" our home offices are! In addition, at home we are bending over to pick up socks, toys, children, laundry, groceries, to vacuum, and more!

It seems, then that people are almost always reaching forward or bending their backs.....and eventually we all look like some version of the Humpback of Notre Dame!

Well, ok, not quite that bad. But, the repetitive reaching forward, sitting and bending have a negative cumulative effect on the poor little soft tissues in our bodies, like muscles, tendons, nerves, blood vessels, the discs in our spines, and sometimes even the ligaments that hold our bones together.

There are actually two major categories of posture: working postures / positions, and the kind of posture our body has no matter what we do. For example, reaching forward bending over are types of working postures or positions, while a person with constant rounded shoulders and a forwardly positioned head has a poor posture.

Sometimes we're born with poorly aligned bones, and therefore, poor posture, but the majority of us acquire it over time by assuming poor repetitive working postures and not strengthening the opposite muscle groups.

Interestingly, poor repetitive working positions can create poor posture over time due to imbalances of strength on either side of our joints (including the spine) and wear and tear to those soft tissues. And this leaves you performing sub-par no matter what the task.

The good news is that some poor postures are reversible.....to a degree. For example, one of the most common postural problems we see in our country is forward head and rounded shoulders. When you stand up, a plumb line should fall from about your earlobe straight down through your shoulder joint, and then straight on down through the low back spine. If your head or shoulders are forward of this plumb line, you have this postural problem.

So, here are 2 of my favorite stretches and strengthening exercises to do for this poor posture! Now, it should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway: you know to stop these if they cause you discomfort or if you know your medical provider doesn't want you doing them.

Hi 10

Standing, sweep/scoop your hands forward and up slightly overhead, rotating your hands past your head and your elbows forward. Keeping that arm position, now squeeze your shoulder blades down and back like you pinching a pencil between them at about mid back level. You should feel a mild stretch to the front of the shoulders and the chest and like your muscles are working in your upper back between your shoulders. Hold this for 5-10 seconds and repeat 3 times.



Resisted Chin Tuck

Standing with clenched teeth, interlace your fingers and place them against the back of your head. Glide your entire head back into the resistance of your hands (i.e. do not allow your head to move your hands) without allowing the face to tip up or down whatsoever. Try to relax your shoulders. I like to imagine the high school bleachers being pushed back into the wall. Yes, this will give you a double chin! You should feel some mild discomfort anywhere from the base of your skull to the mid-back area. Anyhow, hold for 5-10 seconds and repeat 3 times.

