HM A Guide to Posture Management

What is posture?

Posture is the position in which we hold our bodies while standing, sitting, or lying down. Good posture is the correct alignment of body parts supported by the right amount of muscle tension against gravity. Without posture and the muscles that control it, we would simply fall to the ground.

Over time, poor posture may be caused by habits from everyday activities such as sitting in office chairs, staring at the computer, carrying a bag over same shoulder, driving, prolonged standing, caring for small children or even sleeping.

Why is good posture important?

Good posture helps us stand, walk, sit, and lie in positions that place the least strain on supporting muscles and ligaments during movement and weight-bearing activities. Correct posture helps us keep bones and joints in correct alignment so that our muscles are used correctly, decreasing the abnormal wearing of joint surfaces that could result in degenerative arthritis and joint pain. Good posture reduces the stress on the ligaments holding the spinal joints together, minimizing the likelihood of injury. Correct posture also allows muscles to work more efficiently, allowing the body to use less energy and, therefore, preventing muscle fatigue. Good posture helps prevent muscle strain, overuse disorders, and even back and muscular pain.

Consequences of poor posture

Poor posture can easily become second nature, causing and aggravating episodes of back and neck pain. Several factors contribute to poor posture-most commonly, stress, obesity, pregnancy, weak postural muscles, abnormally tight muscles, and high-heeled shoes. In addition, decreased flexibility, a poor work environment, incorrect working posture, and unhealthy sitting and standing habits can also contribute to poor body positioning.

How to maintain good posture

The main factors affecting posture are completely within one's ability to control and are not difficult to change.
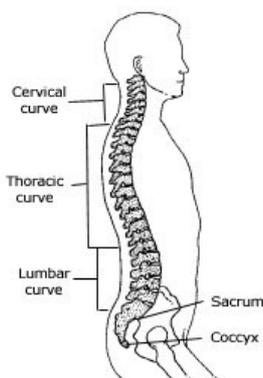
Good posture does not require you to look like a stiff piece of board. Good posture involves having a relaxed appearance and a "neutral spine." A neutral spine retains three natural curves: a small hollow at the base of the neck, a small roundness at the middle back, and a small hollow in the lower back. Many people overcompensate for bad posture by standing too straight, thus eliminating the natural curves of the spine

Many of us spend our days hunched in front of a computer To stay flexible, try to get up for a couple minutes every half hour and stretch, walk, or stand.

When you do have to work at a desk, sitting up with good, tall posture and your shoulders dropped is a good habit to get into.

Sitting properly includes keeping your feet on the floor or on a footrest where knees should be at or below the level of your hips. Adjusting the backrest of your chair to support your low- and mid-back or use a back support. When sitting at a desk, good posture includes relaxing your shoulders and keeping forearms parallel on the ground. Your screen should be directly in front of you. A good guide is to place the monitor about an arm's length away, with the top of the screen roughly at eye level. To achieve this you may need to get a stand for your monitor. If the screen is too high or too low, you'll have to bend your neck, which can be uncomfortable.

Position frequently used objects, such as your telephone or stapler, within easy reach. Avoid repeatedly stretching or

twisting to reach things. If you spend a lot of time on the phone, try exchanging your handset for a headset. Repeatedly cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder can strain the muscles in your neck. Don't cross your legs when sitting because it over-stretches one side of your legs, slowly misaligning the pelvis and spine.

When standing, distribute body weight evenly to the front, back, and sides of the feet. Declutter your bag. Carrying large heavy bags on one shoulder puts unequal pressure on the spine. Opt for a small bag and regularly swap the shoulder you carry it on. Alternatively, use a backpack that sits on both shoulders.

Exercise disciplines that focus on strengthening your core, such as Pilates and yoga, can help you to stay sitting straight. Strong bones are important at any age, but even more so in middle age. Bone density peaks at age 30 and then starts to drop. Sticking to an exercise programme will help keep bones strong in middle age and prevent osteoporosis.

For more information

http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/workplacehealth/Pages/howtositcorrectly.aspx
http://www.backcare.org.uk