Poor Posture Hurts Your Health More Than You Realize: 3 Tips for Fixing It

If you're a serial sloucher, you can probably trace your neck and shoulder pain, stiffness, and aching back right back to your posture. Ignoring advice on good posture can affect your health overall, and set you up for neck and shoulder strain, back pain and even joint damage. You may dismiss the discomfort for a while. But it's your body's way of getting your attention.

Having poor posture may lead to aches and pains, but having it over the long term is when you get real damage. Think of it this way: If you went to the gym and did strenuous leg exercises five days a week, your legs would feel overworked and sore. Sitting at a desk every day can bring similar results. Poor posture forces you to overwork the muscles in your neck and back. Your immune system's efforts to heal those muscles spur inflammation that — over time — can lead to arthritis in nearby joints.

So, how can you tweak your habits to remedy the problem? Here are a few suggestions.

1. Pay attention to your desk setup

When you sit at your desk to work, hold your shoulders and arms at a 90-degree angle. Position your monitor straight ahead at eye level. (Most people place it so they're looking downward, but this greatly increases neck strain).

A 2014 study on text neck — also called tech neck, a problem caused by constantly looking down at your phone or tablet — found that when you hold your head in line with your shoulders, it only weighs about 10 pounds. But for every inch you tilt it forward, the amount of weight it places on your spine nearly doubles. Standing poorly prompts similar problems for your neck and back. If you have access to a standing desk at your office, that's a nice option. But you'll still need to watch your posture.

Keep your spine in a neutral position. Don't jut your butt backward or lean too far forward. Standing in those positions can cause low back pain. And, again, position your computer screen high enough to avoid looking downward.

2. Move around as much as you can

Whether you sit or stand at work, experts recommend working in regular movement. Take a short break and walk around about once every hour if you can. But even when you're stuck at your desk, you can vary your motion. The body loves variety, so don't allow your muscles to get too fatigued. If you have a standing desk, you still need to move. Sway a bit, or step forward and backward for a while, throughout the day.

3. Try these exercises to improve your posture

Changing your daily routine can help you feel better quickly. But making a habit of good posture may take some time. As with any other exercise routine, it takes about four to six weeks to see real change.

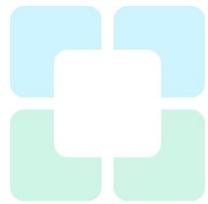Try these exercises to strengthen muscles to improve your posture:

Superman. Lie on your stomach, and simultaneously raise your arms and legs just a couple inches off the ground. Hold, relax, and repeat.

Core. Crunches, planks and leg extensions all help strengthen your core muscles.

Neck extension. Sit comfortably, and press your head firmly backward into your chair (or car) headrest, or into your hands. Hold for 30 seconds multiple times to build strength.

Shoulder blades. Work your trapezius and rhomboid muscles to help pull your shoulders back. Hold an exercise band in front of you at shoulder height, then stretch it across your chest, bending your arms slightly. Return to starting position, and repeat.

If you think bad posture is causing your neck, shoulder or back pain, talk to your doctor about additional tips or therapies you can try to ease your symptoms. Take steps to improve your posture now — you'll be glad you did later on.

Cleveland Clinic
Canada