

Practical Postural Tips

Whether your work, household, and family duties involve heavy physical exertion, standing in one position, or sitting for prolonged periods, you may benefit from some of these tips for preventing or reducing back pain and maintaining or improving posture.

Tips from the American Physical Therapy Association:

- Throughout each day, concentrate on keeping your three natural back curves in balanced alignment.
- Keep your weight down; excess weight exerts a constant forward pull on the back muscles and stretches and weakens muscles in the abdomen.
- Avoid staying in one position for long periods of time; inactivity causes muscle tension and weakness.
- Sleep on a firm mattress, and use a pillow under your head just big enough to maintain the normal cervical – neck – curve. Avoid use of oversized or several pillows.
- Exercise regularly; exercise promotes strong and flexible muscles that keep you upright in a proper postural position.
- Protect your back by using good body mechanics; bend your knees when picking something up or putting it down; carry a heavy object by using two hands and keeping the load close to your waist.
- Wear comfortable and well-supported shoes. Avoid continuous use of high-heeled or platform shoes, which distort the normal shape of the foot and throw the back's natural curves out of alignment.
- Walk with good posture; keep your head erect with your chin parallel to the ground; allow your arms to swing naturally, and keep your feet pointed in the direction you are going.¹

Tips from the American Chiropractic Association:

- When you wash dishes, open the cabinet beneath the sink, bend one knee and put your foot on the shelf under the sink. Lean against the counter so some of your weight is supported in front.
- When ironing, raise one foot a bit. Place it on a small stool or a book to take some strain off of your back.
- To vacuum, use a “fencer’s stance.” Put all of your weight on one foot, then step forward and back with the other foot as you push the vacuum forward and back. Use the back foot as a pivot when you turn.
- While talking on the phone, don’t cradle the phone between your ear and shoulder. That can lock up the spinal joints in the neck and upper back, and cause pain. Instead, hold the phone with your hand or use the speakerphone.
- While watching television or relaxing, don’t use the sofa arm as a pillow. The angle is much too sharp for your neck.²

Tips from Texas AgriLife Extension Service Passenger Safety:

- Avoid driving for more than two hours without taking a break to stretch your legs.
- Change your driving position by adjusting the seat from time to time. (Many vehicles provide built-in adjustable lumbar [lower spine] supports.)



- Cruise control may benefit you when driving on highways.
- Shorter drivers may benefit from pedal extensions to avoid sitting too close to the steering wheel and air bag. (For safety, be sure to keep at least 10 inches between your breastbone and the cover of the air bag module.)

Sources:

1. American Physical Therapy Association (2009). The secret of good posture [on-line]. Retrieved April 22, 2009. From http://www.apta.org/AM/ContentImages/APTA_IMAGES/ContentImages/ptandbody/Posture/Posture.pdf.
2. American Chiropractic Association (2009). Housework [on-line]. Retrieved April 22, 2009. From <http://www.acatoday.org/print.cfm?CID=76>.