

## **STAND UP STRAIGHT!**

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How many times were you told that when you were young?

How many times have you said it recently to your children or grandchildren?

The answer to both questions is likely too many times to remember. In fact, poor posture has become an even greater problem with the prevalence of computers in the home, school and work place.

You can see the adverse effect of modernization every day --- people sitting at computers --- sometimes for hours at a time. They may start by sitting straight but within a short period of time, the head drifts towards the computer screen, the shoulders roll forward, the person leans to one side as they use the mouse, and the back slouches forward. This type of posture can contribute to neck and back pain as well as headaches.

And laptops are even worse. Desks are generally too high for these modern devices, but putting it on the coffee table to use while watching TV is even worse for your posture. Putting your laptop on a pillow in your lap is likely the best solution --- although not ideal.

## **COMPUTERS**

If you use a desk model computer, make sure that:

- The monitor (screen) is directly in front of you so that you don't have to look down at it.
- Use an anti-glare screen (much easier on your eyes).
- Put your keyboard on a pull out tray (which attaches underneath the desk) with a side tray for the mouse. That way there is less strain on your wrists, arms and shoulders.
- Invest in a comfortable chair that can adjust for your height and body type.
- If you have a tendency of your lower back paining while at the computer, try a kneeling chair (also known as a Swedish chair or sometimes a computer chair).

## **“SHOULDERS OUT, CHEST OUT!”**

If you were in the military, the drill instructor may say this many times a day. On the other hand your parents likely did as well. With your posture, this is half right --- shoulders back that is.

When you sit or stand, you should be aware of checking to make sure that your shoulders are back (and not rounded forward), and that your head is positioned over your shoulders.

## **POSTURE CHECK**

It is a good idea to check the posture of younger people especially as they are growing. Sometimes, spinal curvatures can develop in the lower and/or upper back. This is called a scoliosis.

Many such curvatures are minor but if the scoliosis progresses, and becomes severe or advanced, it can affect a young person's self esteem, as well as be a source of concern with respect to the heart and lungs if the rib cage becomes deformed (as a result of the spinal curvature).

## **WHAT TO LOOK FOR ...**

When looking from the back:

- Are the shoulders level?
- Can you see any curves in the spine? (Hint: place a finger on either side of the spine and run

these down the length of the spine. This will help you to visualize if the spine is straight or if there are curves).

- Is one 'hip' higher? (The 'hip' refers to the iliac crest which is part of your pelvis. On the side of the body, it is the rounded edge on the top of the pelvis just below the rib cage).
- Are they "knocked kneed"? (Knees together and ankles are not).
- Are they "bow legged"? (Knees apart and ankles together?).
- Check the feet. Do they have high arches? Do they have flat feet?

### **CHECKING FROM THE SIDE ...**

- Head back over shoulders? (Earlobes should be over the "point" of the shoulder. The point of the shoulder is the AC joint which is where the "collar bone" or clavicle, joins with the "shoulder blade" or scapula.
- The side of the hip (bony bump at the top of the leg; greater trochanter) should be directly in line with the shoulder.
- The postural line should extend through the earlobe, AC joint and greater trochanter and down to the middle of the foot (specifically the base of the 5 th metatarsal which is the small bump along the outside edge of the foot).

### **WHEN TO CHECK**

Children should be checked every six months, especially during their developing and the teenage years. If you notice any postural problems developing, be sure to have them examined by a health care professional. If the scoliosis (spinal curvature) seems to be developing quite quickly, x-rays may be necessary to establish a baseline and accurately measure the curvatures, with periodic follow up to assess if there is any significant progression.

### **HOMEWORK**

No --- not on the computer --- for you! Check out your children and grandchildren's posture. And be more aware of yours too!

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