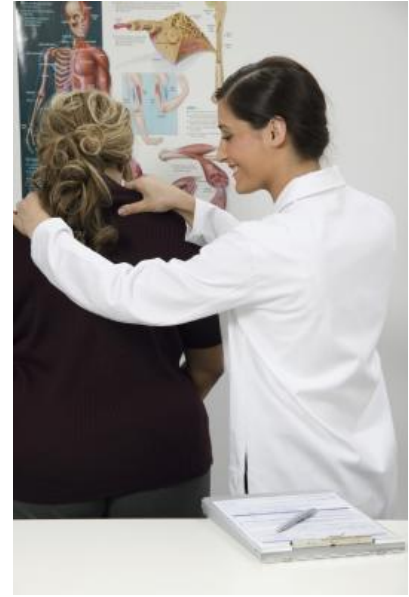


How to Get Rid of Bad Posture

Bad posture contributes to **sore necks, backs and shoulders, and slouching over can compress your lungs and other internal organs, inhibiting digestion and respiratory health.** Long-term bad posture can lead to unsightly rounded shoulders or a "dowager's hump." Expensive ergonomic chairs or support braces may help in the short term, but **the most effective way to improve posture is through a few simple lifestyle changes, including exercise, good shoes and simply sitting up straight.**

Step 1

Wear comfortable shoes. **Those high heels might look nice, but they're throwing your body out of whack and wrecking your posture.** For everyday footwear, choose something with a low heel that allows your feet to bend and flex, such as sneakers, flats or sandals, or considering going barefoot. Save those high heels for special occasions.



Step 2

Sit in a chair that allows you to have your feet flat on the ground and that encourages good posture. It doesn't need to be a specially designed ergonomic chair; depending on your body type, a simple kitchen chair or stool, or even a stability ball, might work just fine. When sitting, the small of your back should be slightly concave and your shoulders should be straight (not slumped forward) and positioned directly over your hips. If there is a backrest, it should encourage you to sit up straight, not lean back. Arm rests should be positioned at your natural elbow so that you do not have to lift your arms up or lean forward to use them.

Step 3

Take regular breaks to get up and stretch if you have a job that requires you to sit in front of a computer all day. **Sitting for too long causes your body to stiffen up and encourages slouching** to try to get more "comfortable." Stand up and walk around for at least five minutes out of every hour. Lift your arms above your head, then lean forward and touch your toes. Do whatever you can to exercise your body and get the blood flowing.

Step 4

Consider doing yoga. **Yoga gently stretches your body, subtly building muscle tone and improving posture.** You can take yoga classes at many gyms or other health or wellness centers, or you can practice yoga at home by viewing instructional yoga DVDs or by following exercises in books. If you choose to take yoga classes, talk to your instructor for suggestions about which yoga poses may help you improve your posture.

Step 5

Stand up straight. **Good posture means keeping your feet, hips and shoulders all aligned.** Your back should curve toward your belly slightly so that your butt sticks out a bit. Your neck should be straight and your head should be upright, not bent forward. Don't let your chin jut forward. A support bra or posture

brace may force your body into good posture, **but it's more productive in the long run to train your body to naturally use healthy posture.**

Tips

- Talk to your doctor before starting yoga or any exercise routine. Your doctor may be able to offer some specific advice or exercises for improving your posture.

The Importance of Posture Assessment

Good posture can help your health and make you look better. A posture assessment is an evaluation to determine whether you have good posture. Posture assessments are most often conducted by chiropractors, but posture can also be assessed by sports massage practitioners, exercise physiologists and other health professionals.

Significance

Proper posture helps muscles function properly, decreases abnormal wear of joints that could lead to arthritis, prevents backaches and muscular pain, reduces fatigue and contributes to a good appearance, according to the Cleveland Clinic. "Headaches and lower-back problems are often due to poor posture," says Elizabeth Callen, D.C., a chiropractor in Denver who performs posture assessments. A posture assessment will analyze how you hold your body against gravity and find posture problems that can then be corrected.

Types

Most posture assessments are performed while you are standing, but they may also be done while sitting. The simplest type of posture analysis is a visual assessment. **"Major posture abnormalities can be seen with the naked eye, but a posture chart is used to pinpoint subtle posture problems,"** explains Callen. Posture may also be assessed by using a plumb line, such as a weighted string hung from the ceiling to establish a line of gravity. For seated assessments, pressure sensors inside a chair are used to evaluate proper posture, according to Callen. Posture may also be assessed by computerized analysis. Computerized posture assessments are considered the most precise, according to Rhonda Crockett, a sports massage therapist and posture assessment specialist at Ohio State University Medical Center in Columbus, Ohio.

Correcting Posture

A posture assessment includes educating the patient on how to correct posture problems detected in the assessment, according to Callen. After going over the results with your chiropractor or health professional, specific exercises and stretches are often recommended to help resolve posture abnormalities. The assessment may also include instruction on how to correct poor posture while standing or sitting. **To stand up straight, Callen recommends holding your shoulders back with your chest forward, tummy tucked in, chin up and head high with most of your weight on the balls of your feet.** Proper sitting posture means sitting with your spine straight, your shoulders back and your buttocks touching the back of the chair.

Tips

To improve posture irregularities revealed by an assessment, **consider taking up yoga.** In addition to flexibility and relaxation, yoga can help correct your posture, says Crockett, who also suggests Pilates

classes for improved posture. Simple changes may also be helpful. Be sure your office chair is ergonomically correct-look for one with an adjustable back support or use a lumbar pillow. Avoid crossing your legs or leaning to one side too much, which makes it difficult to sit straight. Finally, avoid carrying heavy purses, shopping bags and backpacks, which can exacerbate poor posture while standing and walking. A posture assessment is the first step, however. "Many people don't know they have poor posture," Callen says. "A posture assessment leads to lifestyle changes that can improve posture and ease health problems."