

Perfect Your Posture, Improve Your Health

By Editorial Staff

Ever try balancing a book on your head (for more than a second)? To do it, you need more than just patience; you need ideal *posture*.

One hundred and thirty thousand years ago, when residents of the planet possessed complete Neanderthalic characteristics, posture wasn't really that high on the list of health priorities, to say the least. At the time, we assume finding food, surviving the seasons and avoiding death by all manner of creatures were considerably more important. But this is 2011 and we can stand upright, walk upright and consider our health a precious asset. And yet, like the Neanderthals, our apparent disinterest in good posture remains.

Why is good posture so important? It's pretty simple. **When the spine is properly aligned with its natural curvature and the entire body – from the ears to the shoulders to the hips, knees and down to the ankles and feet – is in balance, we maximize spine health and avoid poor posture-related pain and dysfunction. Ideal posture creates ideal balance; it also optimizes breathing and circulation. And shouldn't we all want to achieve that?**

May is National Correct Posture Month, so we thought it was high time to get you out of your slumped, bent-back, round-shoulders position that is likely all too common if you work at a computer, spend considerable time texting or checking e-mail on your cell phone (who doesn't these days?), or engage in any of the countless activities that put your back, neck and spine at risk courtesy of poor posture. It's time to stand tall, walk tall and improve your spinal health, all at the same time!

For tips on the best ways to perfect your posture, look no further than Straighten Up America, a health promotion initiative developed in 2005 with an admirable vision: to educate the public about the importance of good posture and spinal health, to the point that "every American will take two or three minutes every day to care for their spinal health, just as they care for their dental health." Straighten Up, which partners in promoting the nation's health with the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, is designed to get children and adults up and moving while they improve their posture and spinal health. The Straighten Up program also includes healthy lifestyle recommendations congruent with the goals and objectives of Healthy People 2010, America on the Move, Steps to a Healthier US and the 5 A Day programs.

One of the earliest tests of this program proved quite encouraging: After five weeks of daily practice of "Straighten Up" exercises, more than 80 percent of participants reported improved posture; just under 80 percent said they had strengthened their core muscles; and 80 percent reported that after performing the exercises, they now sat and stood more upright, and their backs felt more comfortable in that position.

Are you and your family ready to perfect your posture? Here are a few Straighten Up exercises; to download the complete list and for more information, visit www.straightenupamerica.org.



The Butterfly: Standing and with head held high, belly button in, place your arms behind your head and gently pull your elbows backward. Slowly and gently press your



head against your hands while counting to two. Relax, breathe, and repeat three times.

Tilting Star: With head high and belly button in, spread your arms and legs into a star. Breathe in and slowly stretch one arm over your head and slide your opposite arm down your leg. Slowly tilt your star to the opposite side. Relax. Repeat two times.



Twirling Star: In the star position (hands and legs forming a star; see Tilting Star description), turn your head to look at one hand. Slowly twist your entire spine to watch your hand as it goes behind you. Relax and repeat (each side) two times. Keep your head high, belly button in.

The Hummingbird: With head high and belly button in, put your arms out to the sides with your hands up and pull your shoulders together in the back. Now make small, backward circles with your hands and arms. Bend at your waist from side to side, keeping the circles going as you count to 10.

