

How's Your Posture? {the ergonomics issue}

Ergonomics is an applied science concerned with designing and arranging things people use so that the people and things interact efficiently and safely. It looks at the type of work you do, what tools you use and your whole job environment. The goal of ergonomics is to make sure that you are safe, comfortable, and less prone to work-related injuries. Proper office ergonomics — including correct chair height, adequate equipment spacing and good desk posture — can help you stay comfortable at work.

Examples of ergonomic changes to your work might include:

1. Adjusting the position of your computer keyboard to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome.
2. Being sure that the height of your desk chair allows your feet to rest flat on floor.
3. Learning the right way to lift heavy objects to prevent back injuries.
4. Using handle coatings or special gloves to suppress vibrations from power tools.

There is also a relationship between posture and ergonomics. “Stand up straight!” “Pull your shoulders back!” As children, we were told to have good posture. So just what is good posture?

The answer is that good posture is **dynamic**. Dynamic posture focuses on the alignment of the body while performing different movements, such as pulling, pushing, squatting, and balancing. According to Gray Cook, founder of Functional Movement Systems in Danville, Virginia, to maintain proper dynamic posture, you must have a balance of stability and mobility. This allows your body to absorb and distribute forces throughout your body evenly.

QUICK TAKES

Many of our postural problems can be traced to over-tensed neck muscles that interfere with the free movement of the head in relationship to the spine. The beginning of good posture is to make sure your head balances lightly on the top of your spine. When this happens, your spine becomes longer, your neck becomes freer and your joints and muscles function with a minimum of excess tension.

Try these tips to improve your work ergonomics and your posture!

1. KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Know the warning signs of back pain caused by poor ergonomics and posture. Back pain may be the result of poor ergonomics and posture if it is worse at certain times of day or week (such as after a long day of sitting in an office chair, but not during the weekends).

2. TAKE A BREAK!

As muscles tire, slouching, slumping, and other poor postures become more likely; it puts extra pressure on the neck and back. In order to maintain a relaxed yet supported posture, change positions frequently. One way is to take a break from sitting in an office chair every half hour for two minutes in order to stretch, stand or walk.

3. INCREASE YOUR AWARENESS

Increase your awareness of posture and ergonomics in everyday settings. Being aware of posture and ergonomics at work, at home, and at play is a vital step towards instilling good posture and ergonomic techniques. This includes making conscious connections between episodes of back pain and specific situations where poor posture or ergonomics may be the root cause of the pain.

4. STAY IN ALIGNMENT

Keep your body in alignment while sitting in an office chair and while standing. Distribute body weight evenly to the front, back, and sides of the feet while standing. Also be aware of and avoid unbalanced postures such as crossing legs unevenly while sitting, leaning to one side, hunching the shoulders forward or tilting the head.

5. EXERCISE REGULARLY

Regular exercise such as walking, swimming, or bicycling will help you stay aerobically conditioned, while specific strengthening exercises will help the muscles in your back stay strong.

Strengthen Your Core for Better Posture!



A strong core is essential to good posture and will reap a wealth of other benefits! Aside from occasional sit-ups and push-ups, core exercises are often neglected. But it really pays to get your core muscles — the muscles around your trunk and pelvis — in better shape. Check out seven more reasons to include core exercises in your fitness routine:

1. Improve your balance and stability

Core exercises train the muscles in your pelvis, lower back, hips and abdomen to work in harmony. This leads to better balance and stability, whether on the playing field or in daily activities.

2. No special equipment or a gym required

Any exercise that uses the trunk of your body without support counts as a core exercise. Abdominal crunches are a classic core exercise. Try lying on your back and placing your feet on a wall so that your knees and hips are bent at 90-degree angles. Tighten your abdominal muscles, then raise your head and shoulders off the floor. Classic push-ups count, too. You can also do push-ups on your knees or standing up against a wall.

3. Core exercises can help tone your abs

Want more defined abdominal muscles? Core exercises are important. Although it takes aerobic activity to burn abdominal fat, core exercises can strengthen and tone the underlying muscles.

4. They make it easier to do most physical activities

Strong core muscles make it easier to do everything from swinging a golf club to getting a glass from the top shelf or bending down to tie your shoes. Weak core muscles leave you susceptible to poor posture, lower back pain and muscle injuries.

5. You can take it slow

You don't have to dedicate hours a day to core exercises. Instead, concentrate on doing each exercise with correct technique and proper form. Gradually build up to 10 to 15 repetitions of each exercise. Remember to take a break when you need one. If you work your core muscles to fatigue during an exercise session, wait at least a day in between workouts to give your muscles time to recover.

6. You can do core exercises at home

Remember, you don't have to trek to the gym to do core exercises. Try them on the floor at home while you're watching your favorite shows. You can even do core exercises with a fitness ball. To do abdominal crunches with a fitness ball, for example, sit on the ball with your feet resting on the floor, about hip-width apart. Cross your arms on your chest, tighten your abdominal muscles and lean back until your abdominal muscles kick in. Hold for three deep breaths, then return to the starting position and repeat.

7. Core exercises can help you reach your fitness goals

Aerobic exercise and muscular fitness are the primary elements of most fitness programs — and stretching counts, too. But to have a truly well-rounded fitness program, you should include core exercises in the mix as well. Whether you're a novice taking the first steps toward fitness or a committed fitness fanatic hoping to optimize your results, a well-rounded fitness program is the best way to reach your fitness goals.*

** Always check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program*



Recipe: Spinach Dip with Mushrooms

A tip from your HealthSmart Dietician: Serve this chilled spinach dip with a variety of raw vegetables, such as bell pepper strips, zucchini coins, cauliflower and broccoli florets, and carrot, celery and jicama sticks.

Ingredients

- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 1 1/2 cups fat-free sour cream
- 1 cup fat-free mayonnaise
- 1 cup chopped fresh mushrooms
- 3 green onions, chopped

Directions

In a medium-sized bowl, combine all ingredients. Mix well, cover and refrigerate. Serve chilled with a variety of raw vegetables.

Nutrition Information (Serving size: 1/2 cup--serves 10)

Calories: 52 | Total Fat: trace | Cholesterol: 3 mg | Sodium: 289 mg
Protein: 2 g | Total Carbohydrates: 11 g | Dietary Fiber: 0.5 g