

What is good posture

'Good' posture is sometimes described as 'back straight, shoulders back and tummy in'. In many respects this posture is good, but posture is about more than sitting or standing as straight as possible. Normally the body adopts many different postures in order to do different tasks and moving into different positions during the day helps the body to remain flexible.

It is better to think of 'good' posture as a position in which you:

- feel safe and well balanced
- are able to do everyday tasks easily
- are doing the least amount of damage to your body

Bad posture

Posture only becomes 'bad' when it causes harm to your body or stops you doing everyday things. This may happen if you:

- hold one position for a long time
- feel unbalanced and have to use effort to stay upright
- find that stiff muscles make it easier to sit or stand in a bad posture, which makes the problem worse

Checking your posture

Achieving good posture takes time and practice. If you can work these checks into your daily routine, it is much easier and eventually will become automatic. Look at yourself in a mirror or watch yourself in a shop window as you go past. Imagine a line drawn through the centre of your body.

- Does your body look the same on each side of the line or are you leaning towards your weaker side?
- Is one shoulder higher than the other? If so you may have a curve in your spine

★ bright idea!

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- Are both bony points of your hips at the same level and pointing forward? You can check this by standing against the kitchen sink or a work surface.
- Keep your head level, the eyes fixed on a window frame or picture and the chin tucked in.
- When sitting, adjust your position to suit you. Your bottom needs to be well back in the seat allowing the knees to bend at a right angle. Your feet should rest flat on the ground or on a footrest (a pile of books can act as an adjustable footrest). If sitting in a wheelchair, make sure your feet are in the right place on the footplates and that the footplates are adjusted correctly.

See also the MS Trust book *Are you sitting comfortably..?, a self-help guide to good posture in sitting.*

Exercises to help the pelvis

The pelvis is the key to good posture. Because the pelvis supports the spine, provides the 'sitting bones' and is joined to the thigh bones, it is like a keystone. If the pelvis is in a good position, the rest of the body tends to follow.

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If your posture has become altered, it will take time to change it again. It may not be possible to reverse all the changes but it is important to remember that there is progress in not allowing things to get any worse. There are very few people who do not notice some improvement once they start an exercise programme.