

Healthy Back Habits: Position and Posture

Correct posture doesn't always get the attention it deserves. The way you hold your body while standing, sitting, and sleeping can influence back health. It often feels easier to slouch or hunch the shoulders, or sleep in a position that seems the most comfortable. Over time bad posture and position can cause unneeded strain on the back, resulting in pain.

The spine of the back naturally forms an S-shaped curve. For good posture, the ears, shoulders, and hips should be aligned. This ensures that the natural curves of the spine are also in line.

If you are seated or standing right now, envision that you are a puppet. Think about a string attached to your head that pulls your body up. Now you are probably sitting or standing up straight. This is good posture.



When you are standing:

- Shoulders are back and chest is forward.
- Head is upright and straight.
- Stomach is tucked in, without tilting the pelvis forward or back.

This should be a natural stance and not rigid. Try to stay relaxed while holding your body in good posture.

In addition, when you are sitting:

- Buttocks should touch the back of the chair with body weight evenly distributed on both hips.
- Place a rolled up towel at your lower back to provide lumbar support and keep the curve of the spine.
- Knees bent at a right angle, keeping them at the same level or a little higher than your hips.
- Feet flat on the ground.



Your back can be affected by the way you sleep. Sleeping in a position that puts your back in proper alignment can help to keep it healthy and relieve pain. It is important that your back muscles rest well during your sleep.



Follow these tips for sleeping position:

- Lie on your side.
- Bend your knees.
- Place a pillow between your knees.
- Be sure your pillow supports your head and keeps your head and neck level.



Sources:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, Office of Research Services, Division of Safety, **Ergonomics Maintain Your Curves**, available online at <http://www.nih.gov/od/ors/ds/ergonomics/index.html>.
- The Cleveland Clinic Health Information Center, **Posture for a Healthy Back**, available online at <http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/health-info/docs/0300/0359.asp?index=4485>

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