



Recognizing your postural type

Poor posture is the source of many body aches. Symptoms include back and neck pain, headache, fatigue, and potentially, even breathing issues. In extreme cases bad posture can even lead to internal organ damage by restricting the blood supply to these areas. Another, less obvious effect of compromised posture can be emotional issues. People who walk and sit straighter automatically project authority and confidence. Therefore, those who slouch send out the opposite message and quite often end up acting and feeling... “slouchy”.

The ideal posture is shown here in the sketch. This is reached by aligning the body through an imaginary vertical line passing from the center of the ear down through the neck (cervical vertebrae), the tip of the shoulder, then dividing the rib cage in half, down through the center of the lumbar vertebrae, then slightly behind the hip joint, slightly in front of the knee joint, to end slightly in front of the lateral malleolus (outside ankle bone).

In this ideal posture, the head is in neutral position, not tilted forward nor backward, and the ribcage allows for efficient breathing.



IDEAL POSTURE

Ideal posture is important because all the curves of the spine are in a normal range, which minimizes the impact of gravity and maximizes the ability to absorb shock with minimal impact on the joint and surrounding muscles.

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We tend to deviate from the ideal posture due to many factors, some of which are easier to correct than others. Changes can be hereditary, due to injuries, mental and physical illness, sports (muscle imbalance due to increased use of one group of muscles versus another- often seen in golf, tennis, ballroom dancing, etc.) or work related factors such as poor sitting habits.

What is your postural type? A good way to find your postural type is to stand in your underwear side on to a mirror and get someone to help you by holding a plumb line (for sale at Synergy+! Just kidding...), and then compare your posture with the diagrams shown below. Sometimes, identifying the correct postural type can be difficult as one can be a combination of the 3 types. Synergy+ can be consulted if you are in doubt, or just want to find out with more accuracy.

The three main postural types:

1- Kyphosis-Lordosis

This is a common posture where the head is forward and the upper back is excessively rounded. The neck flexors are generally weak and the neck extensors are short and tight.

The muscles in the chest are tightened with forward, rounded shoulders (pectorals) and the upper back muscles are lengthened and weak. The pelvis is often rotated forward, with excessive curvature in the lumbar (low) spine. The muscles in the low back and hip flexors are shortened. The abdominal and gluteal muscles are weak and the hamstrings are stretched.



Kyphosis-Lordosis

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2- The Swayback

The head is rotated forward with resulting weak neck flexors. The thorax is rounded forward and at the same time leaning backwards and the pelvis is swaying forward. The curvature of the lower back is too little and almost flat. The knees are hyper-extended (locked) back.

As a result, the lower abdominals and the hip flexors are generally weak. The hamstrings are shortened and tight. The gluteals are weak, and the hip joints are over extended.



The Swayback

3- The Flatback

In this posture, the head is leaning forward. The curves of the spine are flattened and the pelvis tilted backwards. The knees are extended or locked.

This results in weak neck flexors, short and tight hamstrings, and long and weak hip flexors.



The Flatback



These three postures, or postural deviations, are a few of the most common. Poor posture, especially when addressed early on in life can be greatly improved upon. Pilates and Physical Therapy both offer much insight into how to correct and improve upon one's posture through therapeutic exercise, proper stretching, and strengthening of weak core muscles in order to create balance in the body. In some cases posture can be more difficult to correct, as in scoliosis, and in cases where vertebrae begin to fuse. Usually, though, there are still ways to improve upon an existing poor posture and the effects of many conditions can be minimized with proper care and treatment.

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