



Posture Points:

Achieving & Maintaining Spinal Health in Every Day Activities

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Growing up, how many times did you hear your mom or dad say, “sit up straight”? While Mom was right, posture *is* important, most of us do not think about it until after we are suffering from back pain or begin undergoing therapy to relieve the pain. Good posture, both at work and home, is a key ingredient to ensuring good spinal health, and has a great impact on our ability to withstand the day-to-day stress to our spines. Proactively protecting one’s spine – and the surrounding musculature – is also imperative for overall health. Furthermore, maintaining a neutral spine will reduce biomechanical strain and can prevent back pain and injury.

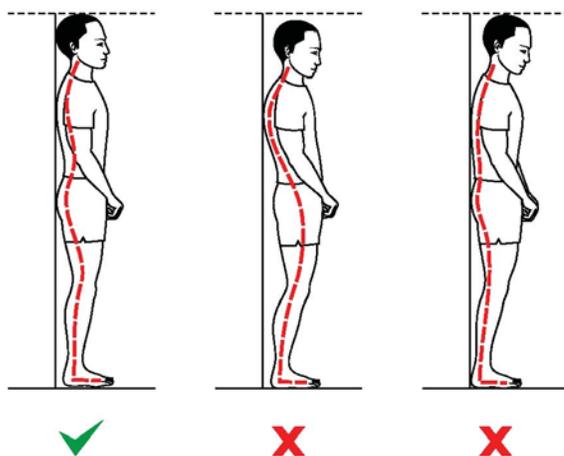


The Importance of a Neutral Spine

What does good posture with a neutral spine look like? A neutral spine is a natural position of the spine when all aspects of the spine are in good alignment. Your natural curves should look like an S from the side, and the natural curves of the neck (or cervical region) and the lower back (or lumbar region) are both maintained. Following some basic principles will allow you to maintain proper posture while standing, sitting, sleeping, and even driving. Tips for maintaining a neutral spine during these activities are listed below.

Standing Posture:

1. Keep your head directly over your shoulders (chest out, stomach in, head back over your shoulders), and keep your shoulders directly over your pelvis.
2. Pull in and tighten your stomach by contracting your core abdominal muscles.
3. Tuck in your buttocks; this will tilt your pelvis.
4. Maintain your feet slightly apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other. Keep your knees relaxed (slightly bent), not locked straight.
5. Try to be more aware of your posture throughout the day while standing.
6. Change your standing position often and move around when able.



Sitting Posture:

Many people experience pain or soreness when sitting for long periods of time at work. Proper work set-up is important to maintain posture and limit neck and back strain.

A user-friendly work station is a must.

- Adjust office chairs and desk positions so work level is at elbow height.
- Computer monitors should be adjusted so that eyes align with the top 20% of the screen, allowing for normal eye gaze at mid-screen level. (Bifocal wearers may need to maintain lower monitor levels to account for viewing through the lower bifocal.)

While many sit toward the front of their chair and end up leaning forward over their work or computer screen, it is preferable to sit back and utilize the chair's lumbar support, keeping the head and neck in good position.

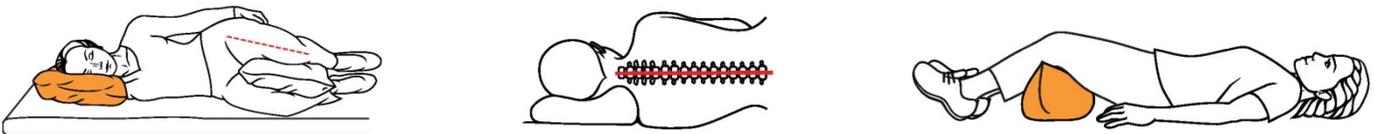
Workers should remember to get up, move about, and stretch periodically.



Sleeping Posture:

Many times sleeping posture is overlooked. Depending on one's preferred sleeping position, pillow placement will support and properly align the spine, keeping good spinal health in mind.

Although stomach sleeping is not recommended, placing a small pillow under one's stomach is helpful. For back sleepers, placing a pillow under one's knees will provide low back support and a neutral spine position. By placing a pillow between the knees, side sleepers can achieve a neutral spine position.



Driving Posture:

Depending on trip length, drivers can experience pain and discomfort in the shoulders, neck and back. Acknowledging important factors such as reach, grip, seat alignment, and back support can prevent strain and lead to a more comfortable ride.

- Reaching can increase stress in the neck, shoulders and wrists, causing back pain. Drivers can minimize reach by sitting a comfortable distance from the steering wheel.
- Gripping the steering wheel in the 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock position is recommended for best ability to steer. When in low traffic, lowering hands to the 8 o'clock and 4 o'clock position can further decrease or prevent neck and shoulder strain.
- Sitting with knees and hips level to each other helps drivers avoid or alleviate back pain.
- Lumbar support is important and provides greater comfort and support while driving. If available, use the seat's lumbar support feature. If not, a commercial lumbar back support should be used between the driver's lower back and the seat.



Prairie Rehabilitation therapists are trained to educate people about ergonomics and injury prevention. If you are suffering from back or neck pain, we offer treatment options to facilitate your recovery. We can also provide training and education to work places looking for ways to balance employee safety and productivity. If you would like to learn more, contact any of our outpatient locations.