

# Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

Did your mother always tell you to sit up straight and not to slouch? Perhaps we should consider the wisdom is this advice. Good posture is necessary for adequate back support. Poor posture can add strain to muscles and put stress on the spine. In the long term, incorrect posture can change the anatomical characteristics of the spine. This can lead to possible constriction of blood vessels and nerves as well as problems with muscles and joints. All of these can be major contributors to back and neck pain, as well as headaches, fatigue, and possibly even concerns with major organs and breathing.

Consider checking your posture several times throughout the day. Check out your posture in a mirror as you pass – you may be surprised to find you do not look as upright as you feel.

Standing side on, draw an imaginary line down the side body starting at the ears and going down to the ankles. Your ears, shoulders, hips and ankles should all be touching this line. The chin should be tucked in so it is parallel to the ground and the back of the neck long. Your hands should rest by your side with the middle finger in the centre of the thigh.

From front on, if the knees are slightly bent, they should point the same direction as the toes with the centre of the kneecap over the second toe. The pelvis should be level and the shoulders the same height.

Standing with your back against a wall you can put your arm through the gap between the wall and your lower back. If your whole arm fits easily, the lumbar curve may be too big. This can be corrected by tucking the tail bone under and drawing the lower abdominal muscles in. Core stability is important for maintaining good posture. Try drawing the pelvic floor upwards and the lower tummy inwards together. This works the transverse abdominal muscles that support the lower back as well as the pelvic contents.

If you have concerns that your posture is not at its optimum it's a good idea to consult a physiotherapist, osteopath, chiropractor or other health professional to get professional advice. Anyone with back, neck, or pelvic injuries should not attempt to correct their posture themselves. This could further damage the body. Contact your health professional before trying to tamper with your alignment.

Exercises to strengthen the back to aid correct posture include rotator cuff exercises and rowing either at the gym on a machine, using dumbbells or a resistance band. Any strength training or lifting that you do must be carried out with correct posture in mind and focus on core stability. Keeping the body supple with regular stretching of major muscles will also help maintain correct alignment.

A great side benefit of maintaining good posture is an improvement in your self-esteem and attitude. If you walk with your head up, you appear more confident, and feel more confident, which improves your attitude and mood, making it easier to walk with your head up. It also gives a more youthful appearance.

Yours in health,

*Jeni*

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