**Avoid the slump: get better posture with these 5 tips**

By Karen Appold

Posture refers to the position you hold your body while sitting, standing, or lying down. In order to achieve good posture, your body parts must be in the right alignment and need to be supported by proper muscle tension. Certain muscle groups—such as large back muscles and hamstrings—help you to maintain good posture.

Some older people get stooped posture that results from rounding of the spine caused by osteoporosis and deteriorating vertebrae. This can cause joint and back pain. But that doesn't have to happen to you. Use these five tips to improve your posture so you'll continue to stand tall as you age.

1. Sit properly. Sit up straight and keep your body balanced. This means placing both feet on the floor, and not crossing your legs or leaning to one side. Avoid being in one position for a length of time—take turns leaning forward with a straight back and then sitting back in your chair. Use a chair that supports your mid and low back, or add a back support such as a pillow. Relax your shoulders.

2. Stand correctly. Stand tall, pulling your shoulders backward. Slightly bend your knees while bearing weight on the balls of your feet. Your feet should be shoulder-width apart. Avoid pushing your head forward, backward, or sideways. Instead, keep your head level--lining up your earlobes with your shoulders.

When standing for a long time, shift your weight between feet or from your toes to your heels and stand on a rubber mat. Don't wear high heels. Consider orthotics.

3. Sleep in good form. In general, firm mattresses are the best choice for most people. Use a pillow. Consider a special one that can help with postural problems if necessary. Don't sleep on your stomach; opt for your side or back.

4. Move with caution. Keep good posture and ergonomics in mind when doing any type of motion--whether it's lifting something heavy or typing on a keyboard. This can help to prevent injury. Back injuries are more prone to happen if you twist or lift due to awkward movements and only using your upper body.

5. Exercise regularly. Walking, bicycling, and swimming all keep your body aerobically conditioned. Strengthening exercises keep muscles in the back area strong. Forms of exercises that focus on body awareness, such as pilates and yoga, can help you to master sitting up straight. Stretching is great for posture, too.

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