

Back Care and Posture

Factsheet

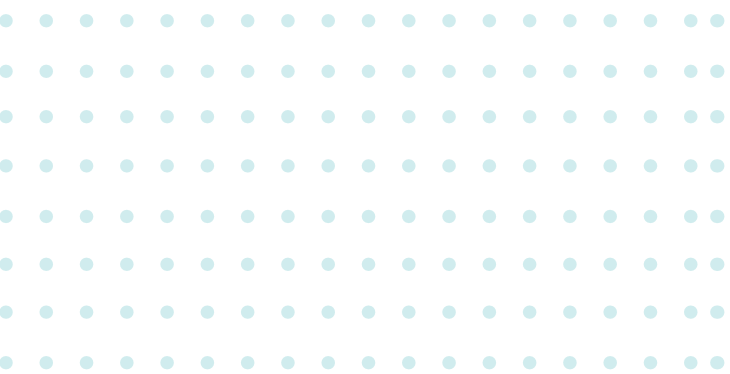
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Introduction

Back pain affects nearly 8 in 10 people. Largely due to everyday oversights like lifting incorrectly, bending awkwardly, and having bad posture.

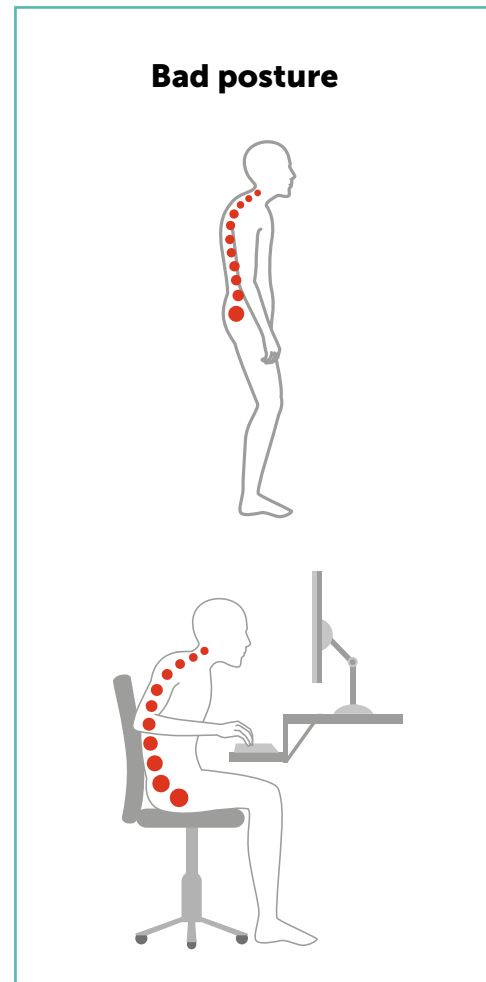
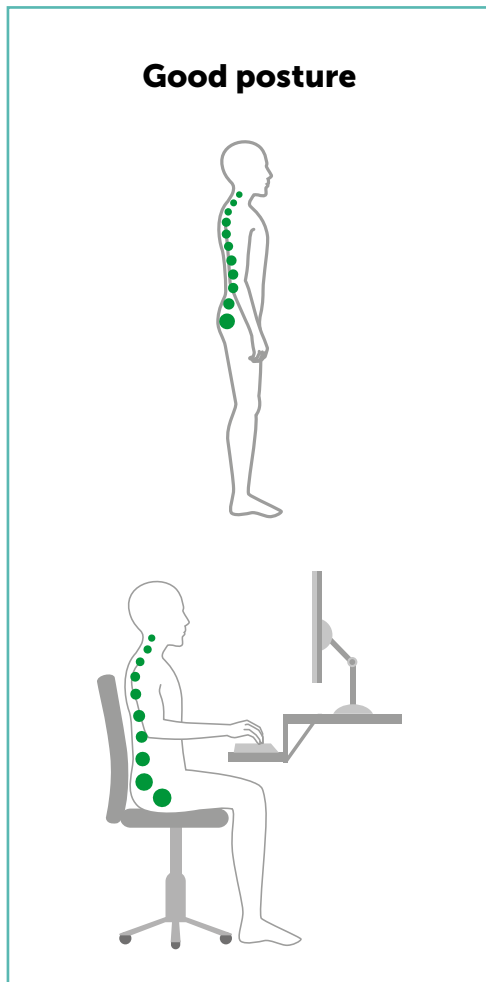
It's easy to forget about holding ourselves in the right way, and many of us are guilty of poor sitting and standing habits. Hunching shoulders while stood up or sat at a desk, craning our neck over a phone, or slouching on the sofa at home are all very common.

For most of us, sleep is the only time our spine can relax, meaning it's under stress for up to two thirds of the day.



Back Care and Posture

Why is a good posture important?



Maintaining a good posture is a big part of your health. It correctly aligns your bones with the body and keeps the tension in your muscles and ligaments properly distributed.

It has many other benefits, too:

- It supports the different areas of the body and protects them from too much stress
- It helps the muscles to coordinate more efficiently, using less energy and avoiding muscle fatigue
- It holds the spinal joints in place, which is essential in maintaining a good posture
- It greatly reduces the risk of injury, due to aligned spinal joints and less stress on the ligaments
- It helps to prevent back and muscular pain
- It reduces the unnatural wearing of joints by keeping them and the bones properly aligned
- It ensures the muscles are used correctly and stops chronic health risks like arthritis

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Avoid injury with the correct posture

Avoid injury with the correct posture whatever your day looks like, from sitting at a desk, being on your feet for hours, lifting heavy items or driving. Be mindful of your spine and your body will thank you.

In the office

- Use a chair that's easily adjusted so you can change the height and position.
- Sit with your back straight and prevent your shoulders from rolling forward.
- Evenly distribute your weight and keep your feet flat to the ground. Try not to cross your legs.
- Place your screen at eye level.
- Get up and move every 20-30 minutes.



In the factory

- Keep feet about shoulder-width apart. Stand straight, with shoulders back and tummy pulled in. Shift your weight from your toes to your heels, or one foot to the other.
- Support your feet with insoles. They're designed to support your arch and distribute weight across the bottom of your foot.
- Take circulation breaks throughout the day. Try rolling a tennis ball under your feet to loosen your hamstrings and alleviate foot pain.
- Lift correctly. Keep the chest forward, use the leg muscles to lift and bend at the waist.
- Elevate your legs during breaktimes or when you get home.



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Avoid injury with the correct posture

On the road

- Make sure your seat is high enough to give you good vision of the road while still allowing clearance above your head. Hips should be at least as high as your knees.
- Move the seat until you can easily push down the pedals fully. Make sure your thighs are supported without pressure around your knees.
- If the steering wheel is adjustable, make sure you can reach it easily and it doesn't obstruct your view of anything vital on the dashboard.
- Adjust the head restraint so it's as high as the top of your head and as close to the rear of your head as possible to avoid whiplash injuries.
- Make sure the seatbelt is tight with the lap belt over the pelvic region and the diagonal strap over the shoulder, not the neck. Pregnant women should place the lap belt flat on the thighs.



At home

- Get into the habit of sitting correctly, even on the sofa. Not slouching may feel uncomfortable initially because your muscles haven't been conditioned to support you in the correct position.
- If you're an avid gamer, sit correctly while you're playing.
- Your knees should be bent at 90 degrees, and your feet flat on the floor. Your elbows should be level with your desk and close to your body. Your shoulders should be relaxed and your lower back should be supported.
- Doing some DIY? Make sure you're lifting safely. Keep the load close to your waist, bend your knees, keep your back straight and don't twist when you lift.
- Avoid 'text neck' while looking at your phone. Move the phone up closer to eye level so the head doesn't have to tilt forward.
- Stay safe while gardening. Carry even loads on each side while moving heavy items, hinge from your hips when you need to move your torso forwards, and use raised beds to prevent you bending forward.



Correcting your posture may feel awkward at first because your body may have become used to sitting and standing in a particular way. With a bit of practice, good posture will become second nature.

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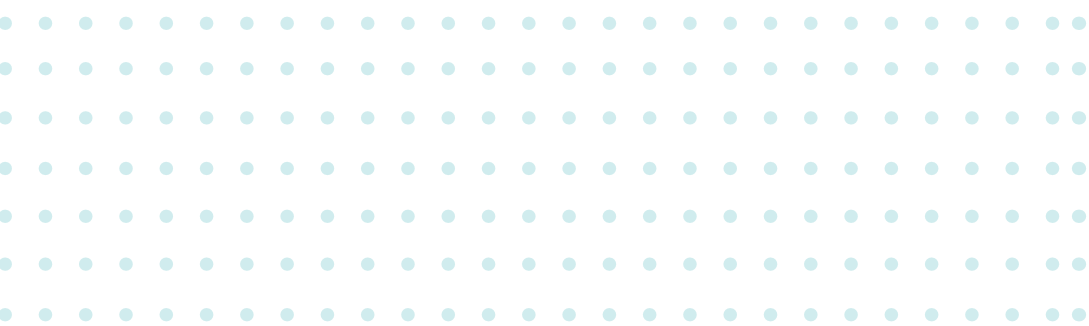
Warm up, cool down

A simple gentle warm up can consist of a 5–10-minute brisk walk, light jog, or jumping jacks to get your muscles warm and your heart pumping before doing some stretching.

Warming up before physical activity or sitting for long periods is important as it dilates your blood vessels, making sure that your muscles are well supplied with oxygen. It also raises your muscles' temperature for optimal flexibility and efficiency. And by slowly raising your heart rate, it also helps minimise stress on the heart.

Stretching allows for greater range of motion and eases the stress on the joints and tendons, which could potentially prevent injury.

Don't forget the cool down, it's just as critical. If you've been exercising, cooling down afterwards keeps the blood flowing throughout the body. Stopping suddenly can cause light-headedness because your heart rate and blood pressure drop rapidly.



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Enhance your posture with gentle stretching

Increase your range of motion with knees to chest



- Lie on your back, with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor or bed
- Bring one knee up and use your hands to pull it gently towards your chest
- Hold the leg in position for five seconds, and then relax
- Repeat this exercise with the other knee
- Repeat five times on each side

Relieve a stiff or sore lower back with knee rolls



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet together
- Roll your knees to one side, keeping your shoulders flat on the bed or floor, and hold for 10 seconds.
- Roll your knees back to the starting position, and then over to the other side and repeat.
- Repeat three times on each side

Release tension with child's pose



- Kneel on all fours with your hands directly under your shoulders and your knees under your hips
- Keeping your back and neck straight, slowly move your bottom back towards your heels, leaving your arms outstretched in front
- Hold this position for 5-10 seconds and return to the starting position
- Repeat this 8-10 times

Improve core strength with the plank



- Lie on your front, resting on your forearms and toes
- Keep your legs straight and hips raised so your body forms a straight, flat line from your head to your toes
- Face the floor and don't let your back slump
- Hold this position for 5-10 seconds and repeat this 8-10 times

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Do you suffer with back pain?

Usually, back pain improves by itself within a few weeks or months, but there are several things you can do to help you feel more comfortable in the meantime.

- Keep moving. Try to continue with your normal activities as much as possible
- Regularly do some easy **back exercises and stretches**
- Take some anti-inflammatory tablets, such as ibuprofen
- Use hot or cold packs, such as a hot water bottle or an ice pack wrapped in a towel

If your pain is severe or constant, lasts more than two weeks, keeps you from participating in your usual activities, or interrupts your sleep, see your doctor or a **physiotherapist**.



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