Posture Pointers – The Importance of Good Alignment

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The quality of your posture can make a big difference in your life. Good posture can make you look and feel younger, stronger and more confident; and **can help improve your breathing, advance your sports performance, decrease your risk of injury and improve your biomechanical efficiency**. And, over the course of your life, **good posture can prevent painful physical strain in your joints and spine.**

How can you tell if your posture needs improving? These are some telltale signs:

- collapsed arches in your feet
- an elevated hip or shoulder
- one side of the body rotated forward or back
- pelvis and hips tilted to the front, back or side
- rounded back
- drooping chest and shoulders
- head jutting forward

These are indications that your body has gotten locked into poor movement patterns for any of a number of reasons, **including muscle imbalance, compensation for injuries, ergonomic problems or poor alignment during fitness and sports activities.**

Changing Habits

It is possible to change poor postural habits. Developing proactive postural habits builds a foundation for a fit body that functions effectively. Try the following 10 tips for improving your posture:

1. **Find Neutral.** Your personal trainer can help you recognize what neutral alignment looks and feels like in your body. This is the position in which the spine is best equipped to deal with external stress and strain. You should be able to move into neutral alignment while sitting, standing and moving.

2. **Remind Yourself Frequently.** You can create ways to remind yourself to do posture checks throughout the day, such as setting a sports watch to alert you hourly or by posting printed reminders on your desk.

3. **Vary Your Position.** Counter the damaging effects of constant sitting by standing as much as possible. Standing in correct alignment requires much less muscular effort than sitting with proper form does. Try using a drafting table so you can work standing; stand up or lie down frequently when you are watching television or talking on the phone.

4. **Develop Your Hip Muscles.** Weakness or inflexibility of the hip muscles that attach to the pelvis may impact the alignment of your pelvis and lower back. Seek an exercise program that includes flexibility training for the hip flexors, extensors, abductors, adductors and rotators.

5. **Perform the Right Abdominal Exercises.** Work with your trainer to learn exercises that train the abdominals to hold the pelvis in neutral alignment. Do more *active stabilization training*, rather than just traditional torso curls and sit-ups, which focus almost exclusively on the trunk-flexing function of the obliques.

6. **Extend Your Back.** Learn how to correctly perform back extension exercises—while standing, on hands and knees, prone on elbows or prone with arms extended. Research has shown that these exercises often improve or eliminate back pain.

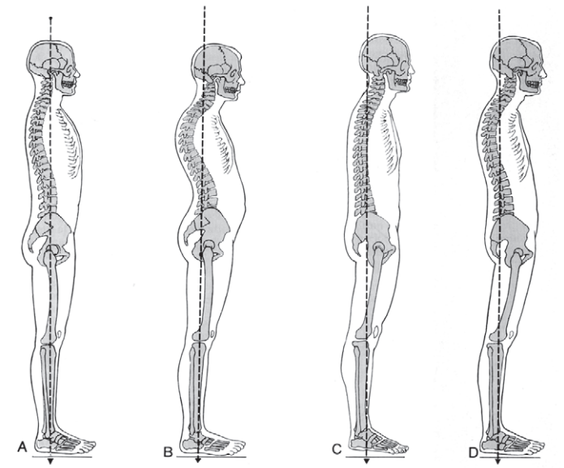
7. **Don't Ignore Your Upper Body.** Seek exercises that help reintegrate the natural coordination and rhythm between the shoulder and shoulder girdle, and strengthen the scapular and arm muscles.

8. **Consider Alternative Exercise Formats.** Pilates, exercises based on the work of Joseph Pilates emphasize alignment and controlled movement of the spine, which can greatly improve your posture habits.

9. **Visualize.** Visualize giant redwoods that stand erect with great dignity for hundreds of years; or imagine growing taller as you stretch your arms above your head. While you walk, concentrate on your posture and imagine yourself moving in perfect alignment.

10. **Check With Specialists.** Postural problems can have a serious negative impact on your health and quality of life. If in doubt, you may want to consult with a Corrective Exercise Specialist.

Four Types of Postural Alignment



Ideal alignment | Kyphosis-lordosis posture. | Flat-back posture. | Sway-back posture.

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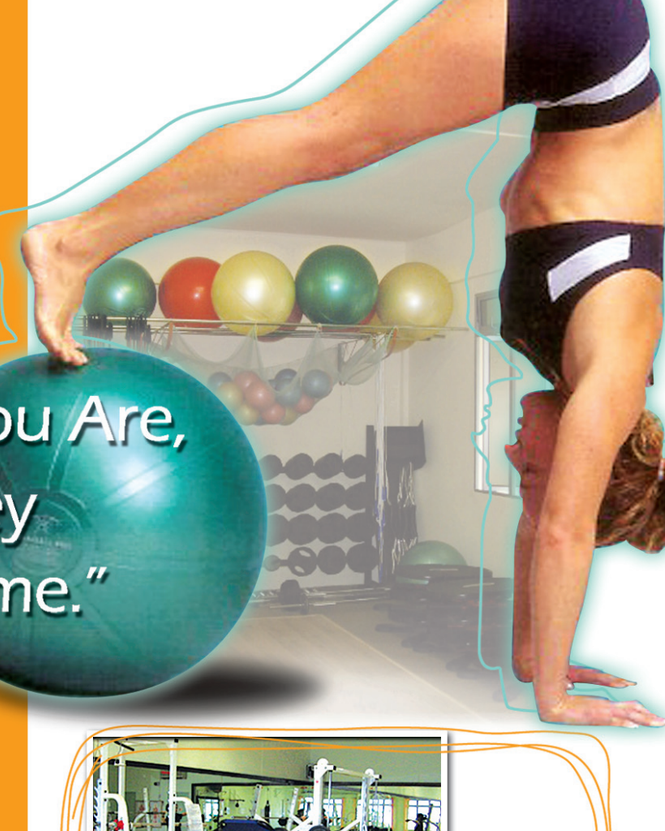

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