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3 Simple Steps to Perk Up Your Posture

By Dr. Merloca

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It's easy to forget about your posture when you're engrossed in work at your computer or sitting behind the wheel in your vehicle. Yet, slowly but surely, if you *don't* take steps to strengthen and lengthen your spine, your shoulders will begin to hunch forward into a more rounded position, and you'll find it difficult to stand as tall as you once did. Meanwhile, poor posture is often a precursor to pain. An estimated 80 percent of the US population will experience back pain at some point in their life, and learning proper posture is crucial if you want to avoid this fate.

So what is "good posture"? It's actually quite different from what is normally taught, such as "sit up straight," "stand up straight," and "tuck your pelvis." By understanding the functional biomechanics of your body and working with gravity instead of against it, you can learn to optimize your body's structural health and the way you move about.

3 Simple Steps to Better Posture

The tips that follow, reported by *TIME*, use yoga postures to help stretch out your shoulders, open up your hip flexors, and lift your chest. If you're already suffering from the effects of poor posture, yoga can be invaluable because it helps to alleviate pain and stiffness.

Yoga is also a lower impact exercise and is a form of exercise that most people can successfully complete. After you read through *TIME's* tips below,¹ check out *Greatist's* infographic that follows for 10 more yoga postures that are beneficial for your posture (and, better still, can be performed virtually anywhere).

1. *"Stand at the front of your [yoga] mat with hands on hips. Step back with left foot into a long lunge. Drop outer left heel so toes face forward at a 75-degree angle. Lunge deeper into front knee, lift arms, press palms and look up to hands for Warrior 1. Hold for 5 to 8 breaths.*
2. *From Warrior 1, straighten right leg as you turn chest to the ceiling. Place right hand on right ankle or shin while you lift left arm directly above you, coming into Triangle pose. Inner right thigh should stay engaged. Hold for 5 breaths.*
3. *Reach left arm above head toward the front of your mat, palm facing down. Bring right arm under right ear, reaching forward with palm up. Hold for 3 breaths. Lift to stand, and with hands on hips step to the front of your mat. Repeat sequence on other side."*

Posture Enemy #1: Too Much Sitting

If you want to improve your posture, it's imperative to engage in intermittent movement throughout your day. Sitting for extended periods of time is an independent risk factor for poor posture, poor health, and premature death. One analysis of 18 studies found that those who sat for the longest periods of time were twice as likely to have diabetes or heart disease, compared to those who sat the least. According to lead researcher Thomas Yates, MD:

"Even for people who are otherwise active, sitting for long stretches seems to be an independent risk factor for conditions like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and kidney disease."

An earlier study, published in 2009, also highlighted evidence linking sitting with biomarkers of poor metabolic health, showing how total sitting time correlates with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other prevalent chronic health problems—even if you exercise regularly. On the other hand, people who spend more time doing low-intensity, everyday activities instead of sitting benefit greatly. One study involved participants who were signed up at the age of 60 and were tracked for more than 12 years, and the findings were quite telling:

- Those who reported overall higher levels of daily intermittent movement suffered fewer heart-related problems
- For every 100 of the sedentary people who experienced a heart attack or stroke, only 73 of the highly active group had such an event
- For every 100 of the least active who died, only 70 of the most active died
- Those who had high daily activity levels *and* engaged in a regular exercise program had the lowest risk profiles overall

35 Times a Day: The 'Magic' Number of Intermittent Movements?

Based on double-blind research conducted by Dr. Vernikos, the minimum number of times needed to interrupt sitting in order to counteract its cardiovascular health risks is in the neighborhood of 35 times per day. Interestingly, and importantly, her research also shows that sitting down and standing up repeatedly for 35 minutes does NOT have the same effect as standing up *once* 35 times over the course of the entire day.

In order to be effective, the activity needs to be spread out. This helps explain why vigorously exercising a few times a week still isn't enough to counteract the ill effects of daily prolonged sitting. When you do this type of intermittent movement, your posture also benefits greatly because you avoid sitting hunched over for extended periods of time.

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