

Have a Pro Take a Look at Your Posture

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Whenever my husband catches me slouching—which he does rather often, I’m afraid—he whispers, “Ramrod.” It’s the code word we came up with when I tired of hearing him bark, “Straighten up!” I appreciate the reminder (really, I do) because I know that I look better when I pay attention to my posture.

And of course, lousy posture creates problems that go far beyond appearance. It puts uneven pressure on the vertebrae, contributing to chronic neck, back and shoulder pain and disk degeneration...creates wear-and-tear on joints and bones...and causes muscle stiffness and fatigue. Poor posture also compresses the lungs, heart and intestines, compromising oxygen intake, weakening the cardiovascular system and impairing digestion. And it is even linked it to an increased risk for earlier mortality.



I spoke with Steven P. Weiniger, DC, a posture expert in Atlanta and author of [Stand Taller—Live Longer](#). He explained that, contrary to popular belief, the rounded back seen on many an older woman is not necessarily the result of osteoporosis but often is heavily influenced by poor posture—not only when the person is sitting or standing, but also when she is in motion. “We train our bodies to develop poor posture habits by sitting hunched over a desk all day, standing in a slouch or even walking in an unbalanced way,” he said. “Fortunately, we also can retrain our bodies to sit, stand and move better.”

Do you share the curse of the curved back? You may not realize it if you do, because it can creep up over the years. What’s more, spinal straightness is just one aspect of overall postural health—so even a straight-backed person may have another type of posture problem, such as an uneven gait, that contributes to pain and loss of function.

Article Continues Below

The first step toward solving a posture problem is to recognize that a problem exists. To that end, Dr. Weiniger said, it’s a good idea to get a posture assessment by a chiropractor, physical therapist or massage therapist who is specially trained in posture therapy.

A professional posture assessment includes analysis of your...

- **Alignment.**

Various methods may be used to check this. Dr. Weiniger uses what he calls *posture pictures*. Whole-body photos are taken from the front, back and side, then superimposed onto a computerized grid. The vertical and horizontal lines make it easy to pinpoint alignment problems, such as one shoulder that is higher than the other...one arm that is held closer to the body...a head that juts too far forward...or feet that turn in too much.

- **Balance.**

To assess this, you may be asked to perform certain balancing exercises. For instance, you may need to

stand on one foot with the other foot held off the ground, thigh parallel to the floor. It's a good sign if you can balance for at least 30 seconds without waving your arms, twisting or putting your foot down, Dr. Weiniger said. Poor balance suggests weakness in the *core*, the band of muscles that encircle your midsection to connect and support the upper and lower halves of your body. Women are particularly prone to problems with core strength because pregnancy overstretches the muscles in this area.

- **Gait.**

The posture professional observes how you walk, either visually or using a computerized video analysis device. He or she checks how each foot strikes the ground...how the knees flex...and whether the head, torso or pelvis shifts to the side. "Asymmetry of motion trains the muscles on one side differently from the other, resulting in uneven posture," Dr. Weiniger explained.

To find a posture professional: Ask your doctor for a referral...or check the practitioner locator at www.BodyZone.com. A posture assessment typically takes about 10 to 15 minutes and costs \$20 to \$35, Dr. Weiniger said. Based on the results, the practitioner can then develop an individualized posture improvement program to help you sit erect, stand tall and move gracefully—so you can look and feel your very best.

Source: Steven P. Weiniger, DC, focuses on posture rehab and biomechanics in his private practice in Atlanta. He is the managing partner of BodyZone, which offers training for certified posture exercise professionals (CPEPs), and a continuing education instructor for Logan College of Chiropractic in Chesterfield, Missouri. His books include *Stand Taller—Live Longer: An Anti-Aging Strategy* and *Posture Pictures: Posture Assessment, Screenings, Marketing and Forms* (both from BodyZone Press). www.BodyZone.com