

Straighten up your habits in and out of the gym to improve your workouts, increase your energy and boost your health.

HOW FIT IS YOUR Posture?

BY LARA MCGLASHAN


As an Oxygen reader, you're a stand-up kind of gal, and we're not just talking about your character. Between training in the gym, running around the grocery store and all your other fit activities, you're doing a lot of moving and grooving on your feet each day. But here's the million-dollar question: Are you slouchier than a hot new pair of fall boots while you're doing all that standing?

There's a reason your mother always told you to stand up straight: Besides sapping your energy and making it more difficult to accomplish everything you've got packed into a day, poor posture has a slew of health consequences that can put a damper on your fit lifestyle; back pain, neck tension, decreased focus and even problems with digestion, to name a few. Learning to perfect your

posture, on the other hand, can boost your active life and your results in the gym. That's because it all interweaves: The better your posture, the greater your range of motion and the stronger you get. The stronger you get, the harder you train, and the more muscle you add. The more muscle you add, the faster your metabolism, and the leaner your body and better your

TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE



A woman is performing a handstand on a blue exercise mat in a grassy field. She is wearing a light green crop top and light blue shorts. Her legs are raised high, and her arms are extended downwards to support her weight. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant hills.

You don't have to turn your life upside down to reap the benefits of great posture. The tweaks are easy!

BECOME MINDFUL ABOUT YOUR POSTURE

Paying attention to your posture habits is the first step to straightening up. Make a conscious effort to think about the way your body aligns as you move, sit and stand during the day. Start by taking the posture test on page 111 ("Take Your Posture Picture"), then come up with other creative ways to remind yourself to check-in. Set an alarm on your cell phone, leave post-it notes on your computer screen and ask your friends and family to watch you as well. It might seem a little silly at first, but becoming more mindful about your habits now will improve your chances of making a long-lasting change that will become natural and easy over time.

Perfecting your posture can boost your active life and your results in the gym.

health. Not to mention that you'll reap the health benefits of straightening up: You'll prevent pain and injuries, boost your flexibility, reduce your stress levels (due to improved breathing) and feel more energized to succeed at your workouts and everything else you set out to accomplish in your day.

So how do you do it? "You've got to work at it a little," says Steven Weiniger, DC, author of *Stand Taller—Live Longer* (BodyZone Press, 2008). You have four basic "posture zones": Your head, torso, pelvis and legs, and your posture is dictated by how you balance them. "Think of blocks that are irregularly shaped balancing one on top of the other," says Weiniger. "Ideally, when facing front, you should be able to draw a straight line from between your feet to your belly button, and through your nose. From the side, this line goes through your ankle, hip, shoulder and ear." In other words, you should be able to draw a line straight through your body, with no body part leaning forward, hunching back or out of line with the others. Your posture should be as close to this ideal standard as possible, but most people are out of whack in one zone or another due to sedentary jobs, repetitive motions and other lifestyle-related issues. Also, things like a large chest, a potbelly or a big bottom can pull your zones out of line, causing you to balance differently.

The good news is that active, healthy individuals like you typically have better posture than most people.

The more fit and streamlined you are, the more in line you'll be and the taller and straighter you'll stand. So leave the slouching to fashion, and get your posture fit today using the Oxygen lifestyle.

TRAIN FOR BALANCE

Once you've become more aware of your posture habits, you can work to improve them right inside the gym.

Each of your muscles has a counterpart, and training all your muscles equally and in balance will help correct your postural deficiencies and improve your training results. Men are typically guilty of training their "mirror muscles"—the ones in the front that they can see when they look in the mirror. And you may be one of the many women who love to train their butts and legs. While this means that you can rock your short shorts in the summertime, it also means that

you can suffer from tight hips and iliotibial (IT) bands. This causes lower back pain and kneecap misalignment if you're not balancing your training by also working on your hip flexors, lower abs and hamstrings. If you want great posture for life, you need to train all your fit parts, even if you're not a "leg woman." If any of your muscles are weak or tight, balance them properly by incorporating a regular routine of strength training, stretching and massage.



DO IT
BALANCE UPPER-BACK MOVES WITH CHEST EXERCISES.

TRAIN THESE MUSCLE SETS EQUALLY FOR OPTIMAL POSTURE:

- GLUTES/HIP FLEXORS AND LOWER ABS
- QUADS/HAMSTRINGS
- CALVES/TIBIALIS
- BICEPS/TRICEPS
- CHEST/UPPER BACK
- ABS/LOWER BACK AND GLUTES
- FRONT DELTS/REAR AND LATERAL DELTS

HERE'S HOW
FOLLOW A LAT PULL-DOWN WITH A CHEST PRESS TO COVER ALL YOUR BASES.

TRY IT
FLIP TO PAGE 78 FOR MORE CHEST MOVES TO PAIR UP.

BRIGHT IDEA
SELF-MASSAGE
USING A FOAM
ROLLER CAN HELP
RELEASE BOUND
TISSUE, HELPING
RESTORE BALANCE
TO THE BODY.

FOCUS ON FORM

Maintaining proper posture during your workout is also essential. "You won't use the muscle effectively through its full range of motion (from the beginning of the move right through to the end) if you're not positioned properly," says Juliet Deane, CSCS, co-owner of a training studio in Morganville, New Jersey. Plus, using improper form can cause additional imbalances in your muscles, emphasizing the problems you already have and setting you up for injury later.

When doing sitting or standing strength moves, imagine a string attached to the top of your head lift-

ing you toward the ceiling to help you sit up tall. "I tell people to tuck their shoulder blades into their back pockets as a visual to get them to retract properly," says Deane. When lying down, allow a natural arch in your lower back and draw your shoulder blades inward, and when lying facedown, focus on keeping your spine neutral. During your treadmill sessions, consciously check your posture every five minutes; you should be standing erect and be in balance, even when using an incline. "Think about walking your chest uphill, so you are constantly opening up and not rounding forward," says Deane. For more tips about maintaining proper workout form, check out *Form Journal* (facing page 66 this month) in each issue of *Oxygen*.

MANAGE YOUR MIDDLE

Having a strong core is also essential to maintaining proper posture. That's



T-STRETCH
YOUR WAY FIT
AND STRONG.

FLEX TIME

Much of an imbalanced posture has to do with muscle tightness, especially through the chest, shoulders and hips. This tightness can cause a stretching and weakening of the opposing muscles. "Most people have rounded, tight shoulders from sitting all day, hunched at a computer or bending over to tend to children," says Juliet Deane, CSCS, co-owner of a training studio in Morganville, New Jersey. "Combat this by strengthening the postural muscles of the upper back and stretching the pecs and shoulders." Take five to 10 minutes after every workout to stretch the large muscles of the back, chest, legs and shoulders. If you've got a part that is especially tight, give it a few extra minutes of work to bring it up to par. Do this stretch regularly to counteract tightness in your shoulders and chest.

T-STRETCH (SEE ABOVE)

Lie faceup on a flat bench with your head and neck fully supported. Extend your arms out to the sides, palms facing upward. Contract your shoulder blades. Hold here, or have someone place 2.5-pound plates on your palms for a deeper stretch. Relax your upper body and allow the weight of your arms (or arms and weights) to gently stretch your chest and shoulders. Hold for 30 seconds to one minute.

LOOSEN UP

MAKE SURE YOU WORK TO ELIMINATE MUSCLE TIGHTNESS ALL DAY LONG BY PAYING MORE ATTENTION TO YOUR POSTURE.

TAKE YOUR POSTURE PICTURE

Think you've got good posture?
Do this exercise and see for yourself.

1. **STAND IN BARE FEET** with what you consider to be your very best posture in front of a bare wall.
2. **RECRUIT A FRIEND** to take four images of you: Front, back and both sides.
3. **PRINT THE PICTURES OUT**, one to a sheet.
4. **PUT DOTS ON THE PICTURES LIKE THIS:** Front side — between your feet and on your nose; back side — between your feet and shoulder blades; side views — on your anklebone and ear.
5. **FOLD EACH PAPER IN HALF** along those dots.
6. **ANALYZE YOUR PHOTOS:** Are the two halves of your body the same? Do you lean forward, backward or to one side? Does your head jut forward like a turtle? Does your pelvis tilt forward or back?
7. **MAKE NOTE OF YOUR IMBALANCES**, then work to correct them. Take more photos next month and compare.

FEEL MORE CONFIDENT!

Need a little ego boost? Then sit up straight! A new study published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology* indicates that good posture can improve your self-image. Participants who sat up straight were more confident than those who slouched or hunched forward, according to study directors. "Additionally," says Steven Weiniger, DC, author of *Stand Taller – Live Longer*, (BodyZone Press, 2008), "those who sit up and stand with good posture are perceived by others as stronger, more potent and more attractive than those who don't."

because your abdominal, hip and lower back muscles work together to keep your spine stable and supported as you train, run errands, sit at your desk at work, run to and from yoga class and cross off just about everything from your "to-do" list each and every single day. To prepare your core for this important task, make sure that you remember to strengthen it during your workouts in and out of the gym. "Big money exercises like deadlifts, squats and other multi-joint moves incorporate a ton of core work, so use those frequently to multitask, simultaneously burning fat, building muscle and improving your posture," says Deane.

A strong core will also help to alleviate any lower back and neck pain that you may be suffering from, so remember to train it diligently. Perform two to three abdominal and core moves several times every week, training for strength on some days with moves such as weighted crunches, and training for stability on alternate days with moves such as front and side planks, says Deane.

Together with a balanced training routine and a strong focus on form during all your visits to the gym, maintaining a strong core can help you to shape up your posture and reap all the health and fitness benefits that come along with it.

Moves For Your Posture

If you're after the health and fitness benefits of proper posture, you need to start in a place you're already very familiar with – the gym. Even if you're working out at home, the following moves can easily be done using minimal equipment. Choose one or two of these posture-improving exercises and incorporate them into your routine on a rotating basis.

Visit oxygenmag.com/betterposture for more posture tips and a bonus move – plus our model's posture plan!



SWIMMER

TARGET MUSCLES: TRAPEZIUS, ANTERIOR AND LATERAL DELTOIDS, ERECTOR SPINAE, GLUTES, HAMSTRINGS

SET UP: Lie facedown on the floor or on top of a yoga or Pilates mat, with your legs together and your arms extended overhead. Lift your arms and legs a few inches off the ground, making sure to keep your spine in a neutral position.

ACTION: Staying lifted, bring your arms down in an arc toward your hips, rotating them so your palms turn to face upward as they come toward your glutes. Try to touch your hands together over your lower back, then reverse the move.



WORK IT
PERFORM THREE SETS OF 10 TO 15 REPETITIONS FOR EACH OF THESE MOVES FOR A POWERFUL BODY!

STABILITY BALL Y-LIFT

TARGET MUSCLES: TRAPEZIUS, ANTERIOR AND LATERAL DELTOIDS, ERECTOR SPINAE

SET UP: Lie on a stability ball with your legs extended behind you, with your head, hips and heels all in one line. Extend your arms down toward the floor alongside the stability ball, while holding your hands in a thumbs up position.

ACTION: Maintain position as you lift your arms up (straight), leading with your thumbs to bring them alongside your head, drawing your shoulder blades down and back. Hold for one breath, then lower back to the starting position.

TOP TIP

PAIR THIS TECHNIQUE WITH THE WORKOUT ON PAGE 92 FOR THE ULTIMATE HOT BODY!

Look five pounds slimmer – instantly!

Straightening up your posture habits could actually help to make you longer, leaner and slimmer – all within just a few seconds.

"When your shoulders are rounded forward and your pelvis is tilted, it gives you a potbelly, spreads your back and makes you look top-heavy," says Juliet Deane, CSCS, co-owner of a training studio in Morganville, New Jersey. "Your torso is also shortened, creating a roll of

skin in your midsection that would not be there if you were standing properly."

Once you're upright you'll not only look better visually, but you'll also work better internally, improving digestion and increasing breathing capacity. "Think about it: If I cinch your midriff

with a really tight belt, it's going to squeeze your guts too tight for proper digestion or breathing," says Steven Weiniger, DC, author of *Stand Taller – Live Longer*, (BodyZone Press, 2008). "Same with posture – if you're slumped over, your lungs, diaphragm and stomach are compressed, affecting digestion and breathing."

EXTRA BAGGAGE

Your workout should happen inside the gym, not on your way to it. Use these tips when carrying weighty gym gear to avoid leaning like the Tower of Pisa:

- Choose a lightweight bag, made of durable material with ergonomic, padded straps.
- A loaded backpack or bag should not exceed 15 percent of your body weight so leave all unnecessary items at home.
- If it still feels like you're lugging granite boulders, consider a gym bag with wheels and a handle as a back-saving option.
- If you're using a bag with one shoulder strap, alternate carrying sides from workout to workout.
- Distribute the weight evenly throughout the bag or backpack for better balance.

BONUS MOVE

LYING PULL-UP

TARGET MUSCLES: TRAPEZIUS, RHOMBOIDS, LATISSIMUS DORSI, TERES MAJOR, POSTERIOR DELTOID, INFRASPINATUS, TERES MINOR

SET UP: Adjust a Smith machine bar so it's a few feet off the ground on a low hook. Lie underneath the bar with your legs extended and the bar positioned across your mid-chest. Take a shoulder-width overhand grip on the bar and retract your shoulder blades.

ACTION: Pull your chest up toward the bar, driving your elbows downward and keeping your body rigid and tight. Lower slowly back to the starting position.



TIP: Keep the weights in your peripheral vision as you're performing the dumbbell wide row.



DUMBBELL WIDE ROW

TARGET MUSCLES: RHOMBOID, TERES MAJOR/MINOR, REAR DELToids, TRAPEZIUS MIDDLE/LOWER

SET UP: Place your left hand and your left knee on a flat bench and hold a dumbbell in your right hand, your arm extended straight down from the shoulder, perpendicular to the floor, with your palm facing rearward.

ACTION: Lift the dumbbell upward, flaring your elbow out to the side and squeezing your right shoulder blade inward. At the top your upper arm should be parallel to the floor in line with your shoulder. Release to the starting position. Repeat.

BENT OVER REVERSE FLYE

TARGET MUSCLES: POSTERIOR DELToids, INFRASPINATUS, TERES MINOR, LATERAL DELToid, MIDDLE AND LOWER TRAPEZIUS, RHOMBOIDS

SET UP: Hold a pair of dumbbells in front of your thighs, your palms facing each other. Bend forward from your hips about 45 degrees, keeping your back flat and allowing your arms to hang straight toward the ground.

ACTION: Keeping a slight bend in your arms, raise the dumbbells up and out to your sides. At the top of the move, squeeze your shoulder blades together, then slowly lower back to the starting position under complete control.