5 ways to achieve proper posture

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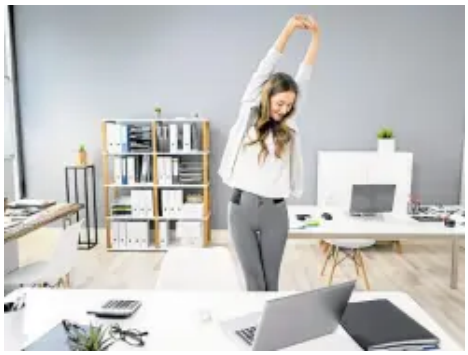
How would you like to look slimmer and taller, improve your mood, reduce neck and shoulder pain, be free of headaches, breathe better, and develop core muscles?



Practicing proper posture helps achieve these and more, according to Angelo Phillip P. Ong, MD from the Department of Orthopedics of Makati Medical Center (MakatiMed).

"The way you sit or stand doesn't just impact your spine, it affects many aspects of your health," says Dr. Ong.

"When you sit or stand properly, your weight is evenly distributed, and your musculoskeletal system is properly aligned. Proper posture relieves you of tension in your neck, shoulders, and upper back, sparing you from migraines and upper body stiffness. It allows your lungs and diaphragm to expand, resulting in better breathing. Sitting and standing properly also engage the muscles in your back, hips, abdomen, and pelvic floor, promoting balance and stability.

And when you're sitting and standing tall, don't you feel so much happier and more confident?"

What exactly is proper posture? "As kids, we were constantly reminded to sit and stand up straight. But keeping your back straight for long periods can lead to muscle fatigue and stiffness," Dr. Ong explains.

Instead, sit and stand according to the natural curvature of the spine. "Note how it curves inward on the lower back, outward on the upper back, and inward again at the neck," Dr. Ong points out. "When standing, keep your feet shoulder-width apart, your weight equally distributed on each foot. Relax your shoulders, keep your knees unlocked, and make sure your ears are directly above your shoulders. When sitting, make sure your feet are flat on the floor, your knees at the same height or slightly lower than your hips, your forearms and knees parallel to the floor, your shoulders relaxed, and your back against the chair."

Proper sitting and standing aren't the only ways to achieve good spine (and overall) health. MakatiMed recommends five ways to achieve this: 𝔵 Exercise regularly. "30 minutes of moderate exercise strengthens your back, leg, and core muscles, which helps your balance, stability, and flexibility," says Dr. Ong. "Combined with a healthy diet, exercise can address or prevent obesity.

Being overweight affects your posture and can trigger degenerative disc disease."

𝔵 Ditch the heels. Stilettos shift your weight forward and strain your feet, knees, and lower back. According to Dr. Ong, "If you must wear them, make sure they're the right size. Add insoles for extra cushioning and bring a pair of flats to change into." Cushioned sneakers appear to be the experts' preferred footwear for those with chronic back pain, as they're "lightweight, comfortable, and offer support and stability."

𝔵 Take a tech break. If you're glued to your smartphone, tablet, or computer for hours, it sets you up for back and neck pain. "Get up every half hour to an hour to stretch and walk around," reminds Dr. Ong.

𝔵 Invest in an ergonomic chair. Part of the work-fromhome workforce? Look into getting an ergonomic chair. "Designed to follow the natural curves of our spine and our body's movements, these chairs feature armrests and headrests, support for the lower back, and an adjustable seat height," notes Dr. Ong. "Take it further by ensuring your laptop screen is at eye level, so you won't have to slouch down while working."

𝔵 Pay more attention. A bit of self-awareness can go a long way in developing your posture. Dr. Ong shares some tricks to fix your posture instantly. "If you feel like you're slouching, correct this by imagining an invisible string attached to the top of your head, gently pulling you upward. Or imagine you're wearing a beautiful necklace and want to show it off to people around you.

"Sitting slumped over or walking with your neck bent down while looking at your phone can take many months to correct," warns Dr. Ong. "But once you replace them with good posture practices, they become habits that stay with you for life."