# Sit up and pay attention: How better posture aids wellbeing

## Poor posture can cause pain, lead to falls and damage your health but there are ways to keep spines strong as we age, says

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As we grow older, our posture changes, which can lead to slouching and discomfort. But experts say that with some simple adjustments and stretching exercises, it's possible to counteract these effects and feel stronger – at any stage of life.

Our posture changes according to how we use our bodies every day, says Michael Fatica, lead osteopath and co-founder of the Back in Shape programme.

"This is a habitual thing – the way in which we sit, stand and move in our daily lives," says Michael. "But it can also be affected by things like muscle strength and muscle tone which have been developed as a result of good exercise throughout life.

"Generally, if no attention is paid to maintaining a good, erect, upright posture, we will lean more and more forwards. Women, in particular, who have low bone mineral density, may develop too much curve in the middle back and rounded shoulders."

Sam Bhide, physiotherapist and founder of Physiozen Ltd, agrees and says: "Sedentary behaviours, poor sitting habits and long periods at a desk can lead to postural problems.

"Stiff joints can also restrict movement and lead to compensatory postural misalignment."

As we age, several physiological changes contribute to postural deterioration, especially in our bones.

"Loss of bone mass can lead to conditions like osteoporosis, increasing the risk of spinal fractures and height loss," says Sam. "Osteoarthritis and cartilage deterioration also cause stiffness, making it harder to maintain proper alignment in knees and hips, affecting posture, causing waddle gait in knee osteoarthritis patients."

Decreased muscle mass and strength can cause issues. Sarcopenia – age-related muscle loss – reduces postural support, leading to instability. Some people also experience spinal disc compression and nervous system changes as they get older.

"Degenerative disc disease leads to reduced spinal height and flexibility," says Sam.

Our sense of body awareness – and balance usually reduces with age, affecting postural control.

"Poor posture can increase fall risk due to poor balance and instability," warns Sam.

"It also restricts movement and reduces mobility."

It can even reduce lung capacity. "This is particularly the case if your lower back is severely rounded," says Michael.

"This means your ability to have good, cardiovascular respiration and fitness is negatively affected."