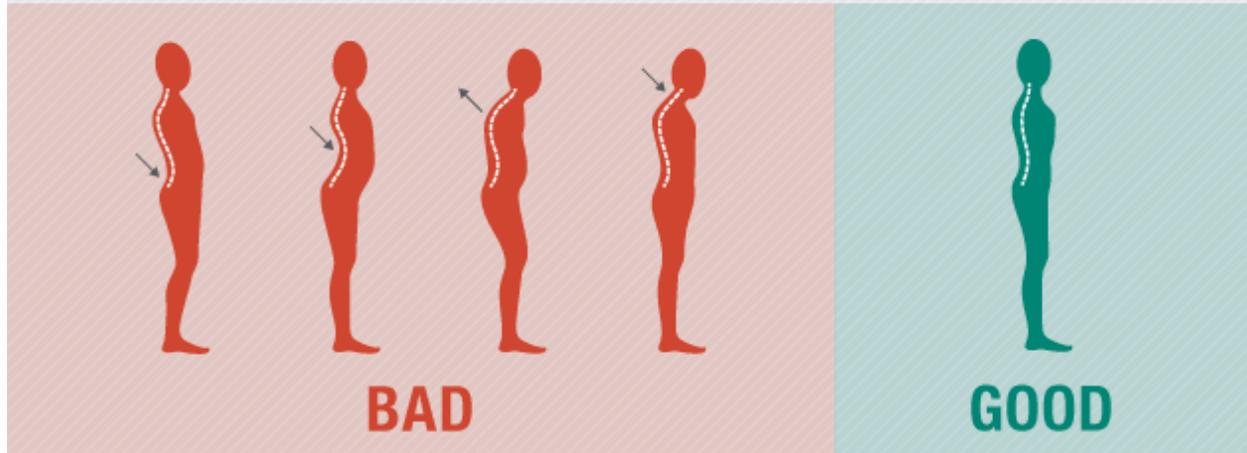


CHECK YOUR POSTURE



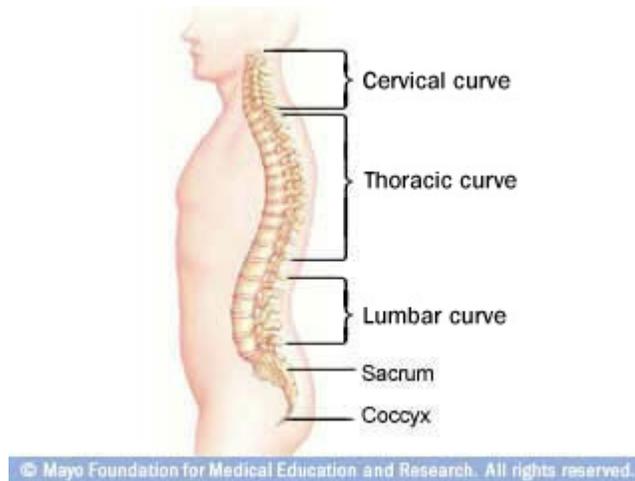
Prevent Back Pain with Good Posture

Posture is far more than just looking confident and poised. Sitting or standing in the right position makes sure our bodies function properly. Here we look at posture and how to improve yours starting today.



When it comes to posture, your mother did know best. Her reminders to stand up straight and stop slouching were good advice.

Your spine is strong and stable when you practice healthy posture. But when you stoop or slouch, your muscles and ligaments struggle to keep you balanced — which can lead to back pain, headaches and other problems.



A healthy back has three natural curves:

- An inward or forward curve at the neck (cervical curve)
- An outward or backward curve at the upper back (thoracic curve)
- An inward curve at the lower back (lumbar curve)

Good posture helps maintain these natural curves, while poor posture does the opposite — which can stress or pull muscles and cause pain.



When standing, keep these tips in mind:

- Keep your shoulders back and relaxed.
- Pull in your abdomen.
- Keep your feet about hip distance apart.

- Balance your weight evenly on both feet.
- Let your hands hang naturally at your sides.

Try not to tilt your head forward, backward or sideways, and make sure your knees are relaxed — not locked.



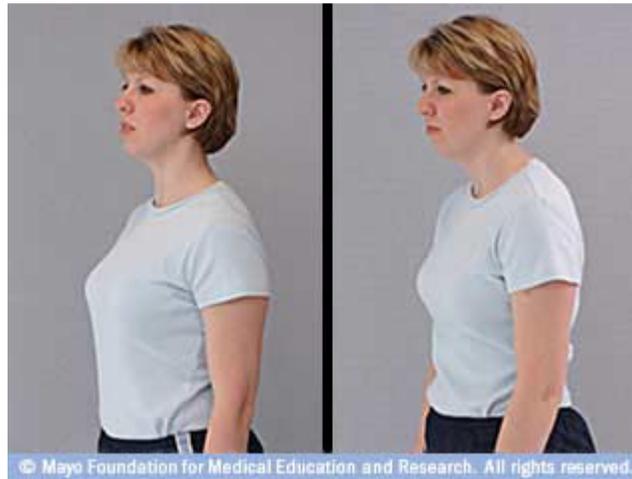
To test your standing posture, take the wall test. Stand with your head, shoulder blades and buttocks touching a wall, and have your heels about 2 to 4 inches (about 5 to 10 centimeters) away from the wall. Reach back and slide your hand behind the curve in your lower back, with your palm flat against the wall.

Ideally, you'll feel about one hand's thickness of space between your back and the wall. If there's too much space, tighten your abdominal muscles to flatten the curve in your back. If there's too little space, arch your back so that your hand fits comfortably behind you. Walk away from the wall while maintaining this posture. Keep it up throughout your daily activities.



When seated, keep these tips in mind:

- Choose a chair that allows you to rest both feet flat on the floor while keeping your knees level with your hips. If necessary, prop up your feet with a footstool or other support.
- Sit back in your chair. If the chair doesn't support your lower back's curve, place a rolled towel or small pillow behind your lower back.
- Stretch the top of your head toward the ceiling, and tuck your chin in slightly.
- Keep your upper back and neck comfortably straight.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed — not elevated, rounded or pulled backward.



To see if you're keeping your shoulders straight, stand in front of a mirror or ask someone else to evaluate your shoulder position. Aim to keep your shoulders in the same position as shown in the image on the left.



Although good posture should be natural, you might feel wooden or stiff at first if you've forgotten the sensation of sitting and standing up straight. The key is to practice good posture all the time. You can make improvements at any age. Stretching and core strengthening exercises can help, too.