

Our Parents were Right!

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“Sit up straight!” Sound familiar? If your parents were like mine, you may have heard this over and over again. Unfortunately, they were right. Poor posture is one of the leading causes of low back and neck pain. Millions of people in the United States suffer from neck and/or low back pain.

The majority of patients that come into our offices suffering from neck and low back pain report the pain began for no apparent reason. Pain may be located in the central neck or lower back region but may also extend into the upper and lower extremities. These patients usually respond exceptionally well to the correct treatment. Krause et al (Spine, 1997) identified postural stresses, like driving and frequent bending and lifting as risk factors for back pain. What appears to be a pain that begins for no reason, can be easily explained by everyday normal stresses. By just making a few minor life style changes, the average person can reduce their pain.

My number one treatment is postural education. Along with exercises to immediately reduce pain, we strongly advise them on correct sitting posture. With the evolution of computers, we have seen a vast increase in a more sedentary work environment. More and more people are less active. This weakens the spinal muscles and greatly reduces overall aerobic conditioning. By changing the way you sit, you can significantly decrease the risk of neck and low back pain (see Figure 1, at right).

First, no crossing your legs. One must maintain a proper lordotic (inward) curve in your lumbar spine (lower back) while sitting.

Second, the height of your chair should be set correctly. With your feet flat on the floor, your hips should be at the level of or a little higher than your knees.

Third, your lower back should be supported by a lumbar support/roll to provide the proper lordotic curve.

Lastly, your elbows should be bent at 90 degree angles with a pullout keyboard properly positioned under your hands with an extension for a mouse



Figure 1

on the side of your dominant hand. You should be facing the screen directly to avoid prolonged cervical rotation to one side.

Along with changing the way you sit, the majority of patients benefit from simple exercises for the neck and lower back. We bend forward more frequently than we do backwards. We frequently prescribe two basic flexibility exercises for the majority of our patients. Cervical retraction (see Figures 2 & 3) and standing backbends (see Figure 4) are very easy to perform and will greatly reduce the risk of neck and lower back pain respectively.



Figure 2 & 3

Cervical retraction is performed by retracting (gliding your head backwards) parallel to the floor. Standing backbends are performed by standing with your feet shoulder width apart and keeping your knees straight. Support your lower back with your hands at your belt level and bend backwards as far as possible without falling over.

By changing the way you sit and performing these two simple exercises, you will greatly decrease the risk of neck and low back pain. If you are suffering from any pain currently, please contact your physician or one of our therapists for a complimentary assessment.

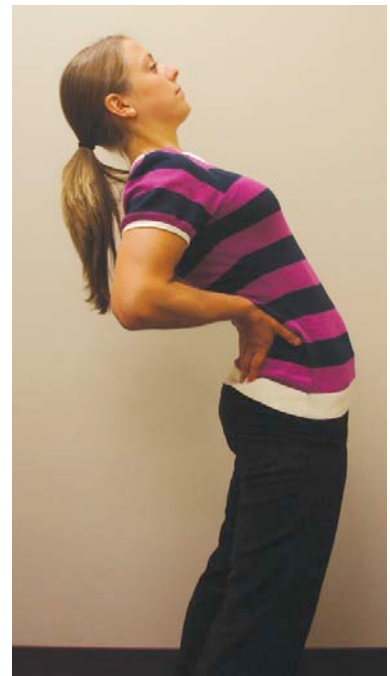


Figure 4