

Posture – are you sitting comfortably?

Good posture could be described as a balance of muscles and tissues, where optimal joint alignment is achieved. As no two people are the same this 'optimal joint alignment' will vary slightly for each individual, due to factors such as size, shape, diseases and disorders, however, the principle and the ideal posture is the same for the majority of the population.

For our body to stay in equilibrium it is important that our posture is as close to perfect as possible, not only will this ensure that the tissues of the body are working efficiently but it will also have an effect on our emotions and well being, our digestion, breathing, injury prevention and recovery to name but a few.

Changes to our posture away from the normal, happen for all sorts of reason. It could be to do with the work we do, sports we play or certain diseases and disorders. Sometimes, being different from the norm, actually benefits the individual as it can actually reduce pain. For example, someone that suffers from spinal stenosis (a narrowing of the spaces in the spine that causes pressure on the spinal cord/nerves), may not have the same type of posture that is classified as normal because their body will have adapted so that they can move with a reduced amount of pain.

Problems start to arise though, when our body holds onto *unwanted* tension in our muscles that is caused by unnatural movement. That is to say we repeat an action or hold a certain position for long amounts of time that adversely affects our mechanics and actually reduces our functionality.

A poor seated position is a great example of how modern day life can impact our posture, in a negative way.....

'Where you sit is what you see' or in this case 'how you sit is what you get.'

When we spend a large amount of our daily life in a seated position, it stands to reason that it is going to affect our posture to some extent, especially if we aren't aware of the way we are sitting. Muscles can become too short and others too long, which changes the way in which we move and perform. For our body to work at an optimal level we need it to be functioning in the way it was designed, unfortunately this can change if we spend a large amount of time in one position.

As you read this now, get a sense of your body in space in relation to how you are sitting. Ask yourself the questions: 'am leaning forwards to get closer to the screen?' 'are my thighs parallel with the floor?' 'am I sitting back into the chair or do I feel as though I'm sitting in the middle of the chair, leaning backwards?'

Although these questions may seem simple the answers will actually be quite profound. The reason for this, is that if you are sat in this position for a considerable amount of time, each day (think about not just when you are at work, but travelling to and from work and then 'relaxing' at home watching the television), you are actually telling your body that this is a natural position to be in through repetition. Your body is remarkable in the way it adapts and how it moulds itself around the

circumstances put before it, if you listen closely enough it's there asking you: 'You're sitting in this position for a reason, so this is how you want your body to be.....isn't it?!'

So what affects can be felt by a poor seating position:

- Tight and underactive muscles
- Changes made through the kinetic chain to compensate for patterns, potentially creating more postural abnormalities
- Headaches
- Lower or general back ache
- Increased susceptibility to injury
- Decreased respiratory capabilities

Although listening and asking questions about yourself can be seen as 'crazy' (I'm actually one of the sanest people I have a conversation with!), it is very beneficial to gain feedback, for you are the person who knows you best. Become aware of how you sit, move and feel.

So what is the ideal seated position?

Have a look below of an ideal sitting position below. Then become aware of the way you are sitting, how do the two compare?

- Your chest should be open with your shoulders in a relaxed position
- The PC should be in line with your forehead
- The back rest should be at approximately 100°
- Your feet should be flat on the floor or on a foot rest
- The keyboard should be in front of you
- There should be enough space for your thighs underneath the desk

One of the first steps to changing our habits is realisation. If we don't realise that something's wrong, how are we meant to do anything about it? The picture above is a great way to start making these positive changes to your posture and to the way you feel. As well as making adjustments to your seated position, you may also want to consider the following things to help you gain optimal joint alignment:

- Workstation assessment by a professional
- Take regular breaks (away from the computer)
- Receiving a personalised flexibility and strengthening programme
- Massage or body therapy

- Participating in Pilates and/or yoga

No matter what you do to help alleviate postural imbalances, small changes, can make a positive difference.