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# GOOD POSTURE GUIDE

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# POSTURE TIPS FROM OUR CHIROPRACTORS

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Our posture is the gateway to our spinal health. Better posture, means better spinal health and that means you are moving better too. In the fast paced rhythm of life, screens dominate and lack of activity is far too common. Maintaining a good posture is a crucial aspect of overall well-being.

As chiropractors with a strong focus on spinal health and posture, we've provided thousands of clients with invaluable postural advice over decades. We share with you many of the same tips and advice.

This comprehensive guide allows you to focus on daily postural habits and gives you practical, bite size tips, to empower you - to improve your posture and ultimately, improve your spinal health.

# SETTING UP AN ERGONOMIC WORKSTATION

An ergonomic workstation reduces the risk of back problems and postural issues associated with prolonged desk work, and can *enhance concentration and productivity*. While investing in specialized ergonomic equipment may be advantageous, the following tips can help optimize your current workspace.

## CHAIR SETUP

- Tilt the back angle slightly from the standard 90 degrees
- Rest feet flat on the ground. Consider using a footrest if necessary
- Maintain a 90-degree angle at your knees and hips
- Use the low back support, if you have one, if not add a cushion
- Armrests should not hinder the chair's mobility, allowing it to roll under the desk

## KEYBOARD POSITION

- Ensure that your wrists maintain a neutral position
- Position your elbow to 90 degrees
- Avoid placing documents between yourself and the keyboard



## MOUSE PLACEMENT

- With elbows bent at 90 degrees, forearm resting on the desk or on a gel pad
- To prevent strain, consider training yourself to use the mouse alternating both your left and right hands
- When using the phone, use earphones and refrain from cradling it between shoulder and ear

## MONITOR SETUP

- Eyes should line up with the middle of the screen.
- If using multiple monitors or screens, ensure you keep yourself as centered to avoid favoring rotating more towards one screen.
- A laptop stand and separate keyboard + mouse can you maintain better posture

## BODY ALIGNMENT

- Allow your body to be lifted up tall and “long” through your spine.
- To support a neutral neck position, tuck your chin slightly upwards and lift your head up and backwards.
- Avoid crossing your legs
- Engage your core by gently pulling your belly button in towards your spine.
- Factor in short breaks every 30 minutes, in between your bigger breaks. This may look like a few second walk around the room.

***You will never remain in a single, perfectly “aligned” posture, and if you were, it would be counterproductive to remain so rigid.***

***The above points serve as effective cues to consider. Additionally, it is completely fine to fidget and move in any way your body desires to assist natural movement.***



# CHOOSING A SUITABLE CHAIR

We previously covered advice on cultivating a more ergonomically friendly office setup. Here are some non-traditional desk chair options for you to explore.

**1. Exercise Ball :** Sitting on an exercise ball encourages you to move your spine, engage your core and back muscles, and helps to prevent slouching. Choose a ball that is the right size so your knees are slightly below hip height.

**2. Kneeling Chair:** These chairs have knee pads and a sloping seat which helps to reduce tension in the lumbar spine and maintain a better lumbar curve. Ensure you get up often and avoid if you have knee problems.

**3. Standing Desk :** Standing up allows the weight of your body to be transferred down your legs, reducing load on your lumbar spine. Bring your attention to standing with equal weight on both feet and take regular 30 minute breaks. Many people prefer to alternate between sitting and standing when working at the computer, helping to break up prolonged and rigid postures.

**4. Saddle Chair:** This chair helps to maintain a normal forward lumbar curve, hence reduces the load in this area, and also helps to open up the hips. Often these chairs have a perturbed base, allowing you to move slightly and encourages core muscle activation.

**Regardless of the seating option you decide on, remember - It's crucial to take regular breaks, stretch and move throughout the day.**

# FAQ

**Q: How often should I take a break from my computer?**

**A:** Every 30-45 minutes.

**Q: If my hips slide forward and I'm slumping in my chair, what can I do?**

**A:** Check the posture tip below: and wedge your hips right back into the chair's corner.



**Q: Are there any particular stretches I should do?**

**A:** Use the "Straighten Up Australia" app for guided exercises and break reminders. It's free and offered by the Australian Chiropractors Association.



# SLEEP POSTURE

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Quality sleep is essential, given that we can spend up to a third of our day in slumber. Ensuring the right pillow and mattress is paramount for good spinal health and a restful night's sleep.

Before delving into these key considerations, let's look at the different sleep positions.

## BACK AND SIDE SLEEPING ✓

These sleep positions naturally align the spine, helping to alleviate potential stress on the back and neck.

Back sleeping helps distribute weight evenly, helping minimise muscle strain on your back, neck, shoulders and hips.

By ensuring that shoulders and hips are stacked, side sleeping promotes a natural posture during the night. Placing a soft pillow between the knees further supports proper posture by preventing pelvis twisting and maintaining alignment throughout the lower body.



## STOMACH SLEEPING ✗

It is best to avoid this posture, as breathing requires turning the head to the side. This head rotation causes stress and strain on your neck, as often the head is turned to the same side. The other problem we find is that this sleep posture compresses the chest, which can affect breathing, digestion and pelvic alignment.

# FAQ

## Q: Can you check the height of my pillow?

A: Your chiropractor will assess your current pillow to find out if it supports your spine, whether you are a back or side sleeper. Just check in with them.

## Q: I sleep on my stomach! Can I change this?

A: Yes you can! It will take time and persistence.

- Here are a few tips to implement this:
- Make a pillow barrier around your body to prevent movement to different positions during the night.
- Place a pillow under your knees to help to relax your lower back.
- Establish an evening routine and keep a consistent bedtime - consider meditation or relaxation exercises to help you fall asleep faster.



## ***Use positive affirmations to create better habits!***

1. Lay in the position you want to change your sleep position to.
2. Repeat in aloud what you want to retrain your mind and body to do. This must be done in the positive - i.e. "I will go to sleep on my back, I will wake up on my back."
3. Repeat 20-30 times.
4. Perform this nightly for at least 2 weeks to start creating a new sleep habit.

*\*\*\* You can also use this positive affirmation "hack" for other habits, e.g. breathing through your nose and not your mouth. Just remember to repeat what you want to change in the positive.*

# PILLOW CONSIDERATIONS

Choosing the right pillow is important for a restful night's sleep as it impacts sleep posture. Different sleep positions require different support to maintain spinal alignment and alleviate uneven postural strains. While tossing and turning during sleep is normal, identifying whether you predominantly sleep on your back or side is helpful in choosing the best pillow for a rejuvenating nights rest.



**BACK SLEEPERS** A low-profile pillow that has some contour is ideal. This helps to support a natural neck curve and neutral head posture. If you are shorter in stature, you may find it more comfortable to have a standard low profile pillow without contours. If you suffer from more advanced forward head posture, a lower profile pillow helps you to naturally bring your head back into a neutral position.

**SIDE SLEEPERS** - If you sleep on your side, you need to support your head in a neutral position and avoid tilting head up or down. Side sleepers need a higher pillow to fill the gap between the shoulder and ear.

## **MAINTENANCE**

Some pillows come with machine-washable covers, while others may need more delicate care. We recommend a waterproof pillow protector to prevent early degradation of your pillow, deter dust mites, and prevent saliva and perspiration from soaking into the pillow.

## **MATERIALS**

Pillows come in a variety of materials, including memory foam, latex, feathers, and synthetic fibers. A memory foam pillow tends to be firmer and a foam pillow generally has a softer feel. Some pillows blend different materials or incorporate hypoallergenic options for those with allergies. The choice boils down to personal preference.

## **FIRMNESS**

The level of firmness comes down to personal preference. As long as you have a good quality pillow that suits your positioning, the firmness is up to you!





# MATTRESS CONSIDERATIONS

## SUPPORT

A better mattress will support your spine and be adjusted for different zones of your body. The shoulder and hip zones are heavier and the mattress should provide more support here. A pocket sprung bed will allow for better support, comfort and little to no disruption if a partner is sharing the bed.

## FIRMNESS AND PILLOW TOP

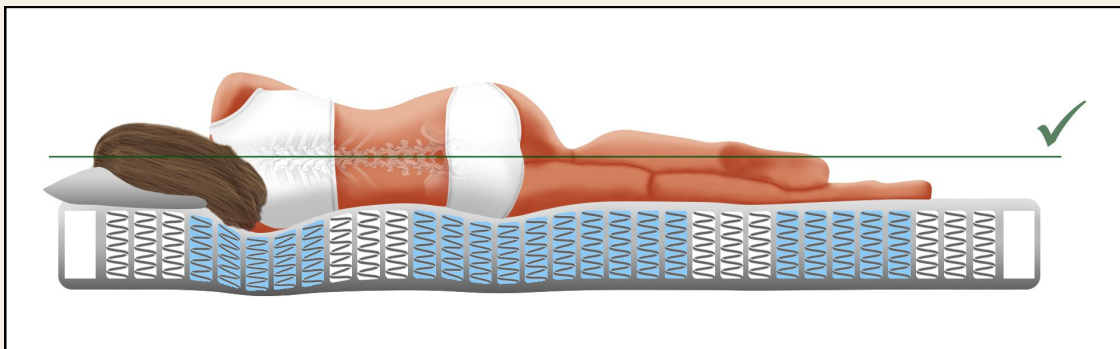
The ideal firmness depends on personal preference. Most mattresses have the same base and the pillow top is where the level of firmness can be adjusted. Some manufacturers will provide different levels of firmness on each half of the bed, catering for partner preference.

## MATERIALS

Other than a latex mattress, most mattresses will be manufactured with a variety of materials, such as latex, foam, steel and wool. All these products will vary in quality and craftsmanship. A better mattress will be made with higher quality products to enhance sleep support, durability and comfort.

## MATTRESS LIFESPAN

This depends on the manufacturer and can span between 7-11 years. Old mattresses tend to lose their support qualities and can detract from comfort, spinal support and sleep quality. Check with the manufacturer and make sure you know when it's time for a new one!



Many mattress companies offer a trial period, so if you're not happy, you are free to exchange the mattress. If you would like know which mattress manufacture we use and recommend to clients, please ask your Chiropractor.

# DRIVING POSTURE

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For those spending hours behind the wheel, making a few adjustments to posture can support your spine during travel.

## **SEAT AND STEERING WHEEL POSITION**

Have seating and steering positions set up to keep your spine in a comfortable and neutral position. Ensure your seat isn't too far back causing your head and upper back to round forwards. If you're taller, lower your seat to avoid rounding of the shoulders. Have the wheel in a comfortable range for your shoulder and elbow height and don't lock your elbows when driving.

## **HAIR CLIPS AND CAPS**

Objects pushing the head forward against the headrest should be avoided.

## **LUMBAR SUPPORT**

A lumbar support is beneficial in maintaining the natural lower back curve, whether you're driving long or short distances. There are many versions you can purchase online, although a tightly rolled towel kept together with elastic bands does the job well! Ensure you tuck the support right into the curve of your lower back.

If you find your hips slide forward, leading to a slumping posture, use the 'Posture Awareness Tip' below and wedge your sit bones/bottom into the seat's corner. This will support you in maintaining a neutral pelvic position and lower back curve (with or without a towel).

## **EXERCISE YOUR NECK AGAINST THE HEADREST**

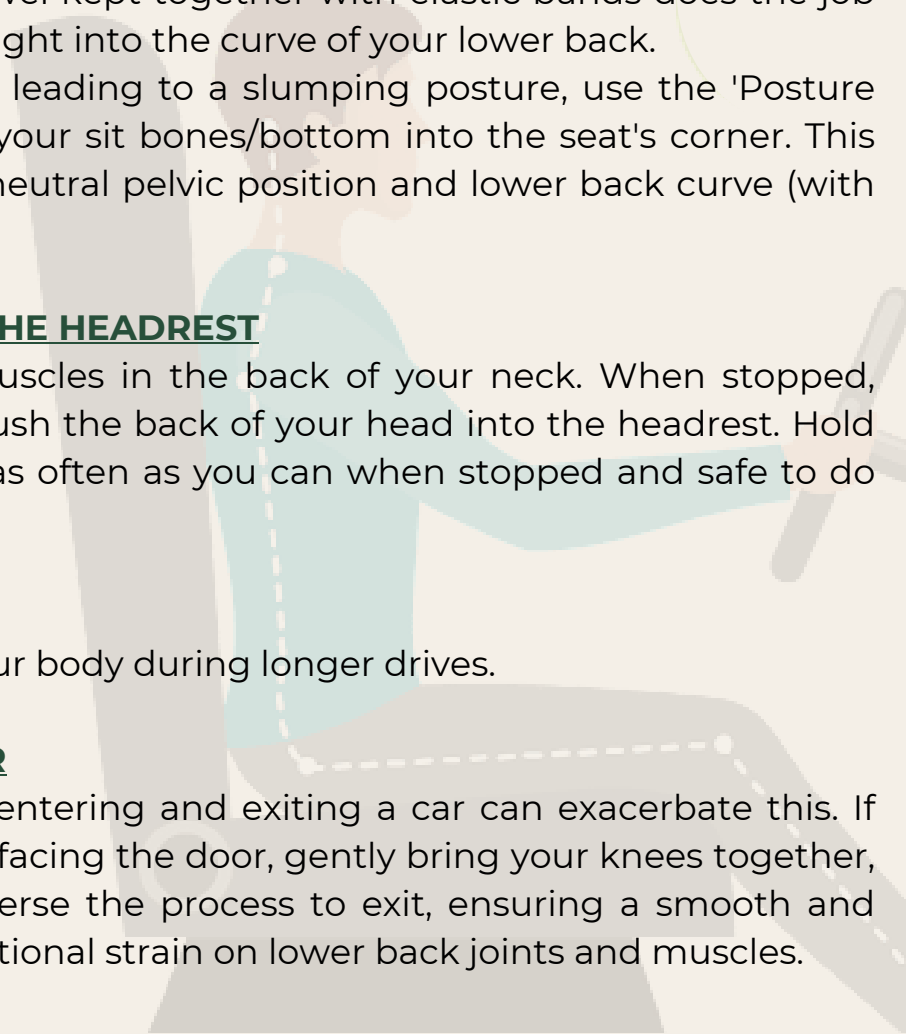
Use your headrest to work the muscles in the back of your neck. When stopped, slightly tuck your chin and firmly push the back of your head into the headrest. Hold for 3-5 seconds and relax. Repeat as often as you can when stopped and safe to do so.

## **REGULAR BREAKS**

Take frequent breaks and move your body during longer drives.

## **GETTING IN AND OUT OF THE CAR**

For those with lower back issues, entering and exiting a car can exacerbate this. If you're experiencing discomfort, sit facing the door, gently bring your knees together, and swing them into the car. Reverse the process to exit, ensuring a smooth and supported transition, avoiding additional strain on lower back joints and muscles.



# POSTURE AWARENESS TIP



If you've developed the habit of 'slumping,' whether at your **desk, driving** or during daily activities, it's crucial to recognize and address this common postural issue.

Repetition strengthens habits, making "slouching" more ingrained. To break free, cultivate awareness and retrain yourself to maintain better posture.

## **TRY THIS POSTURE HACK**

**1.** Pay attention to your pelvic positioning; if it's 'stuck' in a forward or backward tilt, it can hinder achieving a lengthened and relaxed posture. Adjust your pelvic tilt (moving your pelvis forwards and backwards) to a comfortable mid-position, maintaining your normal lower back curve.

**2.** Visualize two balloons—one at your sternum, the other to the center of your head. Gently lift through these points. Elongate through your spine, raising your chest, your chin slightly up.



***Regular practice will lead to more positive postural habits evolving over time!***



# FAQ

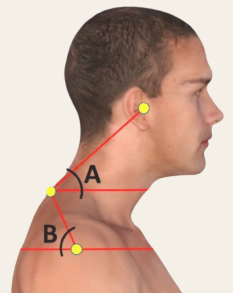
## Q: Are there postures I should avoid?

A: There isn't an inherently "bad" posture; if you can comfortably maintain a posture, then it's suitable for your body. The issue arises when you frequently remain in a specific posture for prolonged periods. This can contribute to postural deformity, spinal dysfunction, injury and pain.

## Two most commonly observed problematic postures:

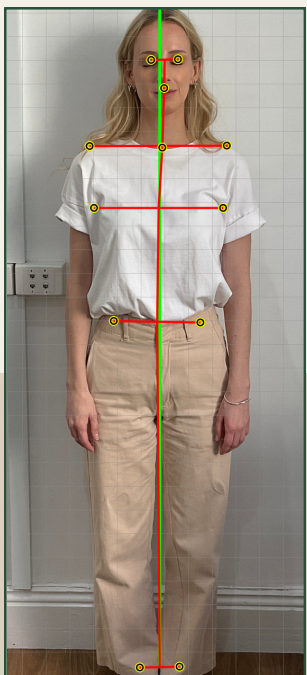
### 1. FORWARD HEAD POSTURE:

Accumulation of time spent with your head in a forward position creates stress on neck and upper back joints, muscles and nerves. Prolonged time on phones, hand held devices, computers and reading are the most common activities which place extra load on your neck! This is a major cause of, neck stiffness, pain and a reduced (or reversed) normal neck curve, leading to abnormal spinal ageing.



If this is you, you can start by being more aware and reducing the load on your neck throughout the day.

### 2. SIDEWAYS SPINAL SHIFTS:



Any X-ray findings and/or posture analysis may highlight a sideways spinal shift. If so, it is important to identify particular positions and postures you adopt throughout the day that encourage this sideways shift and place uneven load on your spine. For example, leaning to the side whilst sitting at your desk, on the couch or while driving. Bring your attention to these postures and keep yourself centered!

Prioritizing healthy postural habits contributes to enhanced spinal health and offers lifelong benefits. By minimizing stress and ensuring even loads on spinal joints, muscles, discs, and nerves - you support overall well-being, maintain ease of movement, and prevent potential issues with the neck and back.

If there are areas that you would like to work on, pick one to focus on before adding another habit. Working on daily habits and postures support your Chiropractic care and lay a foundation for enhanced spinal health.