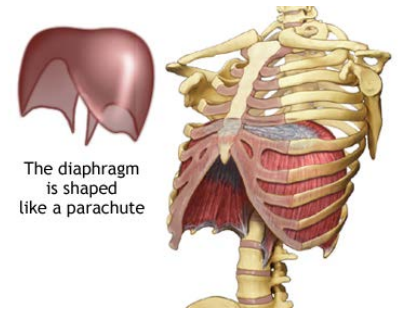


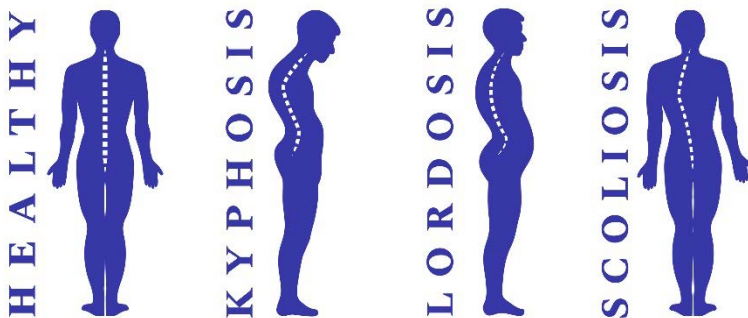
Posture Matters

Posture and overall health go hand in hand. For example, the way we hold our bodies can have an impact on the way we breathe. The diaphragm is a muscle located in the thoracic cavity of the chest, within the rib cage. It extends around the side ribs and to the back ribs as it moves. It delivers oxygen to and from the lungs with each breath. If the diaphragm is crowded by stooped posture, it cannot do its job effectively.



Try this: Round your shoulders. Tuck your tailbone forward toward your pelvis. This will create stooped and bad posture. Take in a deep inhale. Exhale. Repeat the breath. Now relax your body and stand tall. Pull the ribs away from the hips and move the tops of your shoulders down away from your earlobes. Breathe again. Do you see the difference? Stooped posture can limit full and healthy breathing.

Over time, if you hold your body in this stooped position with shoulders rounded forward, muscles in the chest and shoulders will respond and change. Your body will adapt to bad posture and can stay that way. Chronic forward rounding of the shoulders results in a misalignment of the spine called **kyphosis**. A kyphotic spine is just one misalignment that can be a result of poor posture. Other misalignments like **scoliosis** or **lordosis** are often genetic yet can be improved with physical therapy or various functional movement programs like Pilates or yoga. Kyphosis is probably the most common misalignment we encounter as we age. What's most important is awareness of your everyday posture when sitting, standing, walking, or bending.



Connect with your core

Our core muscles, both front and back, leads to a stronger back and better posture. So, connect with your core as you stand, sit or move. **Core activation:** Lie on your back with knees bent. Put a ball or object between the knees. Assume a neutral spine, with shoulder blades relaxed and wide on the surface below you. Your sacrum will be on the mat or

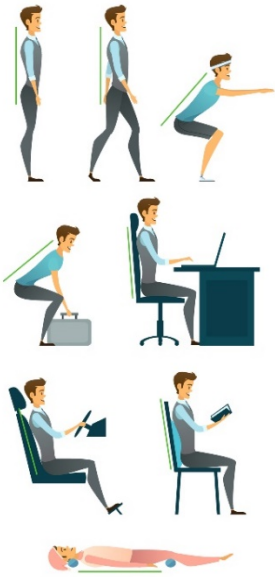
surface, and you should feel a small natural curve in the lumbar spine if you put a flat hand (palm down) in that area of your back. Inhale. Hands can be behind the head or by your hips. On an exhale raise the upper body off the mat by aiming your lower rib cage toward your hips. Bring the upper body forward slowly, with no sudden or jerky movements. Inhale as you relax the upper body to the mat again. Repeat these 4 to 6 times. This is how we start to build our core, by engaging the muscles and feeling the connection in the center of the body.

Do your own posture assessment at home

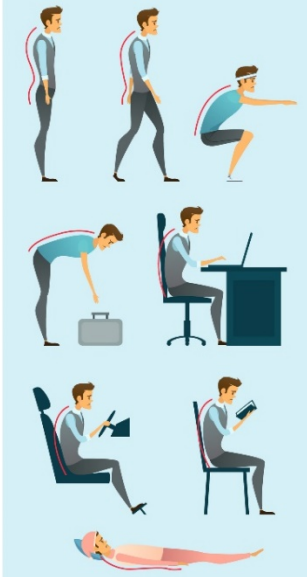
Notice every day how you are moving. How are you sitting? How are you standing? Take notes on your own posture as you notice your body. Awareness is key. For example, how are you standing at your kitchen sink or bathroom sink? Are you bending from the waist and rounding forward with the upper spine? Correct it by hinging first from the hip creases to create a longer spinal alignment. Relax your shoulders back, chest forward, and tailbone out slightly -- instead of tucking your tailbone forward toward your pelvis. Try to use a neutral standing spine. If you need to get closer to something as you are bending or moving forward, start with bending or hinging at the hips. Connect with your core support. Bend your knees. Get in the habit of

POSTURE

correct



incorrect



bending this way before moving your chest and shoulders. On the back page, you'll find an illustration that will help.

In addition to these illustrations, consider a short daily routine to help with posture awareness and building your core. Here are some movements that can be easily done at home or at the gym:

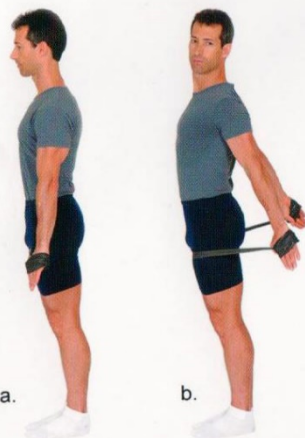
Overhead reach: Use a pipe to do this. Stand tall with ankles lined up under the hips. Hold the pipe with an overhead grip and your hands a little wider than your shoulders. Raise the pipe overhead. Push upward with shoulders moving away from the shoulder ball and socket joints. Hold and breathe. Bring the shoulders back down with your pipe overhead. Relax your upper trapezius muscles back toward the earth. Repeat the stretch and grow taller each time.

Chest expansion using a resistance band: See the image below to practice this movement. This is to strengthen and lengthen the pectoralis major and minor muscles in the

chest. This will help you stand tall if you repeat the exercise regularly.

Reaches using a foam roller: Place a foam roller so it will be parallel to your mat. Lie on the roller with each bony landmark of your spine connected to the surface of the roller. The posterior bony landmarks are the back of your head, upper spine between the shoulder blades and lower back where your sacrum and tailbone are located. Use weights or your hands. Start with the arms straight up overhead and finger pointed to the ceiling. Bring straight arms behind your head and start to make slow, wide sweeping circles from overhead and along the mat or floor. Bring the arms back to the start. Repeat 6 to 10 times. Then change the direction of the circles.

Chest Expansion



a) Stand legs together, holding band across thighs, palms face back.

b) Inhale and press arms back. Hold position as turn head to right, then left. Exhale, return. Repeat.

Tools and Additional Resources

- **Equipment** to consider purchasing if you want to do posture work at home. We have most of these devices at the gym. You can order foam rollers, blocks or resistance bands from Amazon or Yoga Direct:
 - 2 yoga blocks
 - Foam roller
 - Resistance band(s)
 - Lumbar roll: I recommend either the MacKenzie lumbar roll or the Gaim peanut roll. A lumbar roll can help keep your spine in alignment when you are seated.
- **Books:**
 - *The New Rules of Posture in the Modern World* by Mary Bond. Mary Bond also has videos you can find online.
 - *Overcoming Poor Posture, a Systematic Approach to Refining Your Posture for Health and Performance* by Steven Low and Jarlo Ilano.
 - *Exercises for Perfect Posture, the Stand Tall Program for Better Health Through Good Posture* by William Smith, M.S., Keith Burns, M.S., and Christopher Volgraf.