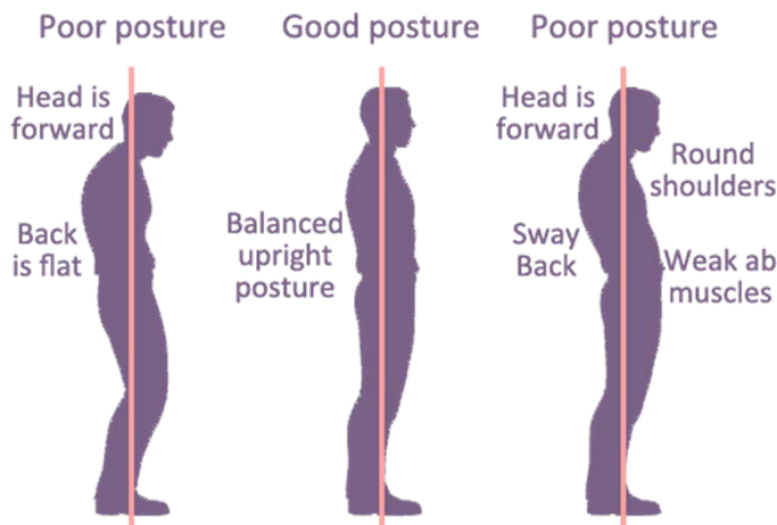


Straight Talk about Posture

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Addressing yoga and posture seems like a no-brainer. But it's surprising how often yogis are not only out of alignment in a yoga pose but walk into a class with poor posture. Improving posture has multiple benefits. Let's talk first about the hazards of sustained poor posture. Improving your posture can reverse any of the symptoms below that you may be experiencing.

***Headache.** Poor posture can strain the muscles at the back of your head, neck, upper back and jaw. This can put pressure on nearby nerves and trigger what are known as tension-type or muscle-spasm headaches.

Back and neck pain. Pain and tightness or

stiffness in the back and neck can be due to injury and other conditions such as arthritis, herniated disks and osteoporosis, but poor posture is a common contributor. Though rarely life-threatening, back and neck pain can be chronic and reduce your quality of life.

Knee, hip and foot pain. Muscle weakness, tightness or imbalances, lack of flexibility, and poor alignment of your hips, knees and feet may prevent your kneecap (patella) from sliding smoothly over your femur. The ensuing friction can cause irritation and pain in the front of the knee, a condition known as patellofemoral pain. Poor foot and ankle alignment also can contribute to plantar fasciitis, a condition in which the thick band of tissue connecting your heel to the ball of your foot (plantar fascia) becomes inflamed and causes heel pain.

Shoulder pain and impingement. Your rotator cuff is a group of muscles and tendons that connect your upper arm to your shoulder. Muscle tightness, weakness or imbalances associated with poor posture can cause the tendons in your rotator cuff to become irritated and cause pain and weakness. A forward, hunched posture also can cause these tendons to become pinched (impinged). Eventually, this can lead to a tear in the rotator cuff tissue, a more serious injury that can cause significant pain and weakness and limit your ability to carry out daily activities.

Jaw pain. A forward head posture may strain the muscles under your chin and cause your temporomandibular joint (TMJ) to become overworked. This may result in pain, fatigue and popping in your jaw, as well as difficulty opening your mouth, headaches and neck pain.

Fatigue and breathing problems. Poor postural habits may restrict your rib cage and compress your diaphragm. This can reduce lung capacity, leading to shallow or labored breathing, fatigue and lack of energy, which can affect your overall productivity.



Now, the good stuff. Here are some of the benefits of better posture:

- More efficient breathing and improved circulation because you aren't crowding the diaphragm and internal organs.
- You look slimmer taller and younger. Oooo-la-la!
- You reduce the chances of shoulder aches or back aches caused by slouching.
- Most likely, you will have more energy.

Try the wall test to check your posture

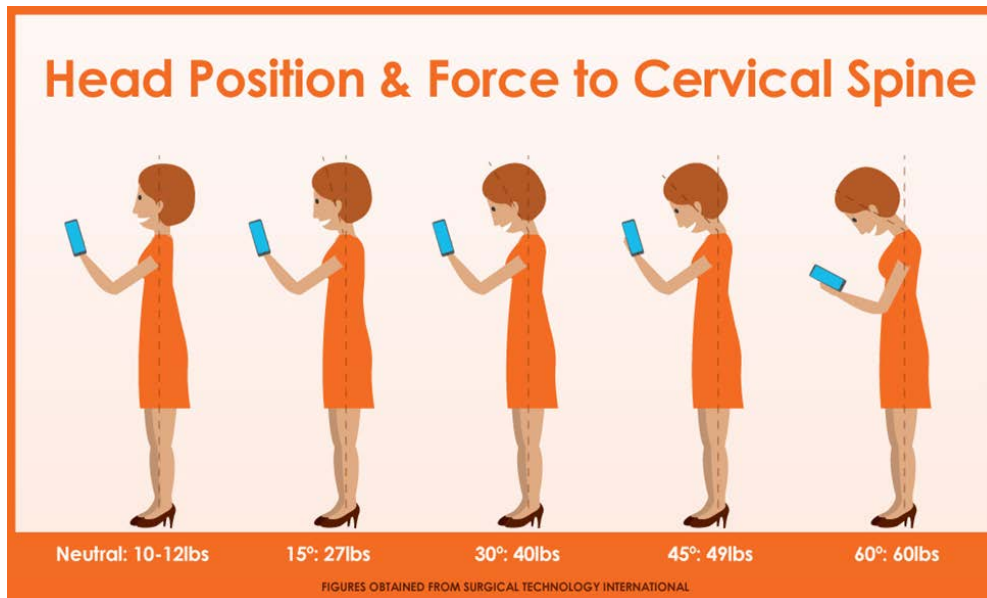
- Stand so that the back of your head, your shoulder blades and your buttocks touch the wall, and your heels are 2 to 4 inches from the wall.
- Put a flat hand behind the small of your back. You should be able to just barely slide your hand between your lower back and the wall for a correct lower back curve.
- If there's too much space behind your lower back, draw your bellybutton toward your spine. This flattens the curve in your back and gently brings your lower back closer to the wall.
- If there's too little space behind your lower back, arch your back just enough so that your hand can slide behind you.
- Walk away from the wall while holding a proper posture. Then return to the wall to check whether you kept a correct posture

Here are some of the yoga asanas or poses that improve posture:

- Back bends – standing or seated. Camel is best.
- Bound forward folds with shoulder blades pulled together.
- Bow
- Upward-facing dog and cobra
- Wheel
- Planks
- Cat/cows
- Locust
- Tadasana (Mountain)
- Bridge
- Warrior poses



Consider the posture challenges in our world...



..And let yoga guide you to better posture!