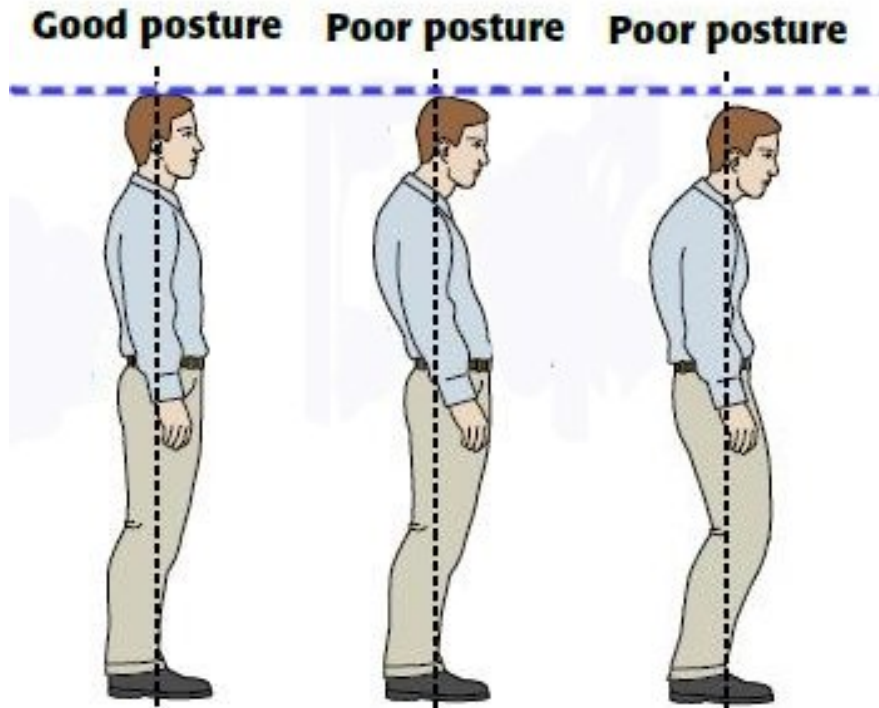


Posture

Why do we suffer with neck, shoulder and lower back pain so frequently today?

Why do we find ourselves needing to massage our shoulders and neck tension as well as stretch our lower backs?

The answer is poor posture.



We are less active these days than our hunter-gatherer ancestors used to be. We spend more time sitting in cars, at desks and computers not to mention TVs. The list is endless.

Our bodies are not designed to sit for long periods.

Our neck, shoulders and lower back muscles are mainly made up of postural muscles designed for standing for long periods. In other words they are much happier when you are walking, running and standing than sitting.

When you sit your lower back muscles stretch. The muscles at the front of your spine may also shorten. When you do this for long periods everyday the muscles weaken and compression forms at the base of the spine.

The stomach muscles have a tendency to relax when we sit and the gut sags. This is a sign of weakened core muscles. Eventually this can contribute to lower back pain as the local spine muscles cannot stabilize the spine effectively.

The weakened abdominal wall increases the arching of the lower spine, which then causes further stress up the spine leading to rounded shoulders. This can add strain to the muscles attaching to the shoulder blade.

A lot of these muscles also attach to the neck and the middle spine. When these muscles shorten over time it will cause constant pain and tension in the neck and shoulders.

This postural strain is the biggest cause of tension type headaches.

So what can be done to reverse this situation?

The first thing to do is to take a look at how we are standing. It is sometimes useful to ask a friend or relative to take a photograph of us standing from the front back and sides. As an osteopath we would always look to see where the body is working hard.

Have a look at the general shape of your posture. Does it look comfortable?

Ok. Now stand again but think about your pelvis as a bucket being half full with water. Pretend to tip the water out of the front and then out of the back by tilting your pelvis gently backwards and forwards. Now, having done that get the water level. This is called 'neutral pelvis'.

Now bring your attention to your tummy. Imagine a point about 4cms or 2 inches below your tummy button. Imagine you are putting on a pair of trousers and you are having a bit of trouble pulling up the zip because there is a bit too much bulge! So pull the bulge in a bit but don't work too hard.

Next, focus on the shoulder blades, gently squeeze them together towards your spine and also gently down towards your bottom, again not working too hard.

Now gently tuck your chin in and lengthen the back of your neck. Feel a piece of string which is attached to the top of your head pulling you skyward. Now breathe and try to smile and relax whilst holding this position. Next, ask your friend or relative to take photographs again and see the difference.

This may feel a little awkward but with practice it will become less so. If you feel pain doing this stop and consult your osteopath or medical practitioner. Don't forget that computers and especially laptops are very bad for encouraging us into bad postural habits!

