

ARE YOU A TURTLE?

By Arielle M. Ali, physiotherapist

The vast majority of us spend hours a day working at a desk or in front of a computer and we are often guilty of poor posture. If we think about posture we may spend a few minutes sitting up straight but once we become engrossed by our work we tend to slump over with our shoulders rounded and heads out forward so that we look like a turtle poking its head out of its shell. Over time, sitting in a slump like this can cause muscle shortening and tightness leading to a permanently hunched over posture.

Slouching may feel more comfortable than sitting up straight (just like sugary treats taste better than celery sticks), however, with time, poor posture can lead to a myriad of problems including arthritis from abnormal wear of

joint surfaces, backache and even shoulder tendonitis! Some of the things that contribute to poor posture include:

Heavy handbags, laptop totes and briefcases.

We have a tendency to always carry our bags on one shoulder or in one hand and this often leads to us having a lopsided posture. Ideally, our bags and briefcases should be no more than ten percent of our body weight (weigh those bags!), shoulder straps should be wide and we should switch bags from one side to the other often.

Shoes

Shoes should be neither too flat nor too high. If you're on your feet for much of the day a low (two to five centimetre) heel is to be preferred.

For prolonged wear, heels should also be fairly wide to allow for greater pressure distribution and toes should have ample room.

Being overweight

Excess weight places additional and unnecessary stress on our joints which can contribute to arthritis and low back pain.

Poor work habits

As mentioned earlier, working at a computer all day can lead to us developing turtle-neck. Poor positioning of our computer and mouse can also contribute to problems such as tennis elbow, neck strains and shoulder tendonitis.



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SO WHAT IS PROPER POSTURE?

Standing

Head should be held straight with the chin in. Shoulders should be back so our chest is forward without arching the upper back. The stomach should be tucked in without tilting the pelvis forward or backward. We should also avoid standing in the same position for a long time.

Sitting

The back should be kept straight with our shoulders retracted. It is also important to sit back into our seats with weight evenly balanced on both hips and not at the edge. To help maintain the normal curves of the back a small rolled-up towel can be placed in the lumbar region. When using a computer, chairs should be turned so that we are facing the screen directly. The screen should be at eye level.

At first it may require some effort on our part to improve our posture (go ahead – stick a note on your desk or computer, even the car to remind yourself to sit up straight!) but we'll look better, breathe easier and feel better too!

For further information please consult your local physiotherapist.

References: *The Cleveland Clinic Foundation; Glamour October 2006.*