

Posture...Why so important?

By Karla Andrews

As a teenager, I vividly recall my mother telling me: “stand up straight. Don’t slouch.”

I would brush her remarks aside and think, “What is the big deal? Why are you always telling me that?”

Well, after many years, I’ve finally got it.

Posture is the foundation for all movements. Good posture helps our body in so many ways. Among those are: how it aids in maintaining muscle strength and joint movement; it improves balance and walking ability; it helps us to breathe better; and, it decreases stress and strain on soft tissues.

Certain changes in the body affect posture during the aging process. Age-related changes include compression of the bones, or vertebra, which make up our spine. People often comment that they have lost height as the years have passed. This height loss can be much more dramatic if the individual has osteoporosis.

Age-related loss of muscle strength affects one’s ability to maintain good posture in various positions. It causes an individual to typically walk at a slower pace the older they become. That’s because the body is attempting to stabilize to compensate for leg weakness.

Another factor that has an effect on older adult posture is the tendency towards weight gain. Postural changes associated with increased abdominal weight can cause discomfort and respiratory changes.

So how can you improve your posture?

1. Exercise – Regular physical activity and appropriately prescribed postural exercises can help improve or minimize changes related to aging.
2. Think “posture” during all your activities. Change position every 30 minutes when awake. Try standing up during the commercials while you watch TV. If you enjoy playing cards, ask the group to stand every 20 minutes for one minute to move around. Three minutes out of 60 seems reasonable to better your health.

One postural trick that I like to use is to pretend that you are taller than you think you are. If you are 5’2”, pretend you are 5’5”. If you feel you are tall enough, stand up to your full body height. Another postural cue for better posture is to find the space between the top of your pelvis and the bottom of your rib cage. Once you have located this area imagine lengthening this space.

Over the years I have become quite attentive to my posture as I carry out my day-to-day activities. It’s never perfect but I strive to make small improvements where I can. I can thank my mother for planting the seed many years ago to “stand up” and pay attention to posture.

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