

Posture

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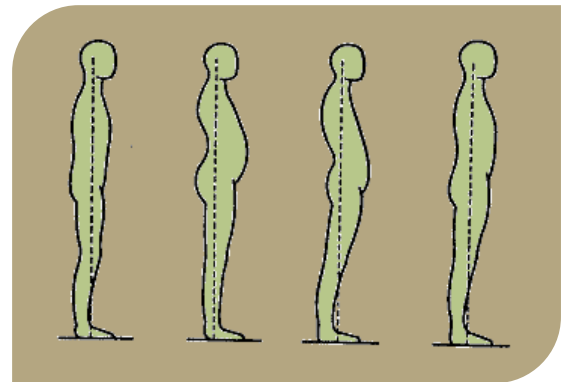
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Posture is an important factor with back pain. Poor posture can start at an early age and may not have too much effect on a young, flexible spine, but when continued through the teens and twenties may lead to wear and tear on the spine in later life.

'Perfect posture' is considered to be well balanced with a gentle 'S' curve. Deviations from this are those with an exaggerated lumbar angle, such as the **sway back** and the **hollow back** postures. These postures can cause increased strain to the muscles and ligaments, especially in the lumbar area of the spine.

The opposite of these is the **flat back** posture, with little or no lumbar curve. This kind of posture is usually rather inflexible and stiff and does not absorb shock very well.



flat back, hollow back,
sway back and perfect posture

Ways to improve your posture

- Remember that there is an invisible force (gravity) bearing down on us all the time we are upright and if we forget about it we will eventually bow down (literally!) under the effect of it.
- Keep your head high and shoulders back, but don't over-exaggerate this like a 'Sergeant Major' pose: it will create different strains and tensions. Try to correct yourself every time you become aware that you may be slumping or stooping (e.g. catching sight of yourself in a shop window).
- When standing still in a queue, try not to shift your body weight from one leg to the other. Try to make sure you feel that both legs are carrying the weight equally. Don't lock your knees back: this sways the hips forward and exaggerates the lumbar curve. Try to keep a slight bend in your knees.
- If carrying shopping bags, carry equal weight with both hands.
- If carrying a handbag, make sure that you aren't carrying any unnecessary items: these will only add to the weight of the bag. Alternate the shoulder which you use to carry the bag, or better still wear it across the body so that the weight is distributed across your back and chest.

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