

POSTURE

Posture can be a tricky topic. We have many beliefs about posture in our culture, and many of us would identify as having “*bad posture*,” or at the very least, posture that “*isn’t as good as it should be*.”

But **posture isn't so cut and dry**. And while there's no such thing as the *perfect posture*, there are some principles that can be very useful in helping us to be able to sit and stand in a more balanced, comfortable, and confident way.

KEY POSTURE POINTS

- **There's no universal perfect posture.** Every *body* is different. Meaning, everyone's body is unique to them. Because of this, we each need to find our *own version of the right posture*.
- **Awareness is key.** If we want to change our posture—the position of our body—we must have some level of awareness of our body. Without this awareness, we can't know whether we are successful in achieving our goal.
- **There are 4 principles of posture:**
 1. Balance
 2. Support
 3. Movement
 4. Context

1. BALANCE

Posture is all about balance. Specifically, *balance within our bodies*, and *the balance between effort and relaxation*.

BALANCE WITHIN OUR BODIES

The shape of our bodies is a series of alternating curves, **like a spring**. Because of this beautiful design, when gravity pulls down on us, the alternating curves of our bodies keep us upright.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN EFFORT AND RELAXATION

If we're able to line up our body in its natural spring state, it doesn't require much effort to stay there, because there's balance. Yet often in our guilt-ridden perfect-posture-seeking ways, we put forth a lot of extra effort to stay in position.

Finding the balance between effort and relaxation means discovering the **minimum required effort** to stay in position. We'll explore this further in the body awareness exercises at the end of this document.

2. SUPPORT

This is the principle of **letting yourself be supported by the surface that you find yourself on.**

How often do we find ourselves in our fancy desk chairs with all the support we might need, only to be hunched forward and stiff as a board?

What if we allowed ourselves to be supported by the chair that we are sitting in so that we can relax our bodies. *That's what the chair is for, isn't it?*

Yet sometimes the chair that we're sitting in doesn't seem to agree with the way we're put together, and we find that when we do relax, it doesn't feel so good. If this is the case, some modifications may be in order.

THE RELAXATION TEST

To determine if your chair works for you, first set yourself up so that the chair is supporting you. Slide back toward the backrest and get both feet on the floor. **Now totally relax.** Let your body turn to liquid. Exhale. Pretend you're asleep. Whatever you need to do to completely relax your body.

And *notice what your body does when you relax.* Does your head fall forward? Does your head fall back? Do your shoulders come forward? Do you fall to one side? What happens?

Whatever happens when you totally relax is what your body is working against as long as you're in this position.

Try changing your position and repeat the relaxation test to see if you stay upright when you relax. If you can't seem to find a position that works for you, a further modification may be in order.

Find a small bath towel or large hand towel. Roll it up and use it to support you where you feel that you need it. Place it in different areas and make it different degrees of thickness and **repeat the relaxation test** to see how it works. You'll quickly get the hang of it. If your chair has levers and adjustments, you can also play with these in the same manner as discussed above.

3. MOVEMENT

With all this talk about posture and maintaining position, it can be easy to forget this very important principle, that ***the body is made to move.***

This principle is here to remind us that even the best posture cannot be sustained indefinitely. So it's quite normal for our bodies to ask us to move after a period of time in one position.

What can movement look like?

- Changing positions
- Deep breathing
- Fidgeting
- Stretching
- Taking breaks

All of these things are NORMAL and helpful for our bodies. **Our bodies thrive on movement.** Every single aspect of our physiology encompasses movement, from the gurgling of our digestive tracts to our beating hearts to our inflating/deflating lungs to the electrical currents running through our nerves. It's all movement, baby.

So while it's helpful to find a position in which you can sit and stand comfortably during times when you need to be still, **it's equally important to allow your body to move.**

Here are some tips for incorporating movement into your stillness, expanded from the list above:

- Allow yourself to change positions every so often
- Allow yourself to slouch every so often. **This is safe.**
- Allow yourself to take a nice big breath every so often
- Allow yourself to move, fidget, dance to get out the tension
- Stop and stretch areas that feel tight or stiff
- Stand up and stretch
- Stand up and walk
- Give yourself a break
- **Give yourself a break**

How do we know when it's time to move? Our bodies will tell us. **We just need to listen.**

4. CONTEXT

The final consideration when it comes to posture is the *context*.

What this means is that nothing occurs in isolation, and we are *intimately and inseparably* related to our environment.

For example,

- When our desk is cluttered, often we feel that our mind is cluttered
- When we feel good, this is often reflected in the quality of our work
- When we feel bad, we move and position our bodies differently

What this understanding calls us to do, when it comes to posture, is to **consider how the entire context is influencing our posture.**

We can ask ourselves,

- *What makes me feel relaxed?*
- *What makes me feel tense?*
- *What makes me feel productive?*
- *What makes me feel sluggish?*
- *What makes me feel safe and supported?*
- *What makes me feel threatened?*

For me, having a clean desk with calming lighting and a flickering candle makes me feel relaxed, and that is reflected in my work and my body.

This is not to say that these features overcome the stress of things that may be out of my control, but **focusing on what I can control makes a difference.**

POSTURAL AWARENESS EXERCISES

Try these simple practices to tune into your body and find your *own version of the right posture*.

The purpose of these exercise is twofold:

1. Find your center point, or *balance point*, in each position
2. Discover the *balance between effort and relaxation* in each position

STANDING BODY AWARENESS

- Set a timer for 5-10 minutes
- Stand with your feet about hip-width apart
- Close your eyes
- Feel the pressure under your feet. Notice the triangle that is formed between the inside ball of your foot, the outside ball of your foot, and your heel. Equalize the pressure under these three points
- Now take a deep breath in, and as you do, let the back of your head rise to the sky
- As you breathe out, let your body settle slightly, relaxing into this more upright position
- Continue to breathe in and out, letting the in-breath fill your body and the out-breath relax your body. Let the movements become more subtle as you find the balance between effort and relaxation

SITTING BODY AWARENESS

- Set a timer for 5-10 minutes
- Find a chair to sit in that is fairly standard (90° angle in your hips and knees). Slide forward so that you are not leaning against the back of the chair. Sit with your feet about hip-width apart
- Close your eyes
- Feel the pressure under your sit bones. Center the pressure underneath your sit bones
- Now take a deep breath in, and as you do, let the back of your head rise to the sky
- As you breathe out, let your body settle slightly, relaxing into this more upright position
- Continue to breathe in and out, letting the in-breath fill your body and the out-breath relax your body. Let the movements become more subtle as you find the balance between effort and relaxation