

Stand Up Straight!

Good posture makes you look and feel great

Want a free makeover? Stand straight and you look thinner, your clothes fit better, and you exude confidence. But it's not just about appearance.

"Your posture affects every part of your health—physical, mental and emotional," says James Manley, D.O., family physician at Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network. "When your organs, muscles and joints are properly aligned, your body works better and your spirits lift." Poor posture decreases lung capacity, and less oxygen means less energy. Hunching over the table interferes with digestion and aggravates acid reflux. Finally, poor posture puts extra stress on the ligaments and muscles of the back, neck and shoulders, leading to backache, neck pain and headache.

"People trying to improve their health focus on diet and exercise," says Kristen Trombley, Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network physical therapist. "Working on good posture goes a long way toward eliminating aches and pains."

How Does Good Posture Look?



Check your posture

Stand with your feet about 4 inches from a wall. The back of your head, shoulders and buttocks should touch the wall, with a slight inward curve at your back.

Have a friend take a side-view photo of you. "People are surprised to see how poor their normal posture often is," Trombley says. Tape up your photo (or a reminder note) as a cue to check your posture throughout the day. "Stand up often and realign yourself," Manley says. Stretch your neck and straighten your back during activities like reading, knitting or working a puzzle. Carrying a heavy purse or briefcase affects posture, too, so lighten your load.

If you're a parent, encourage good posture in your children. Some suggestions:

Limit Game Boy and video game time. Hunching over is built in to these activities.

Lighten backpacks. Children should carry at most 15 percent of their own weight.

Encourage good posture during growth spurts. Tall teens often tend to slouch. ●

Want to Know More? For an illustrated guide to good posture or exercises to correct common posture problems, call 610-402-CARE or visit www.lvh.org/healthyou.

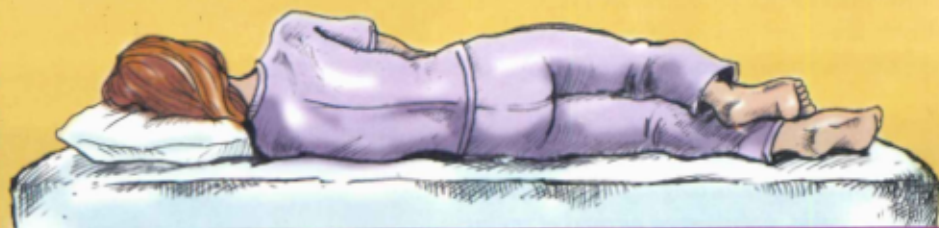
Sitting

Sit so your ears are aligned above your shoulders, shoulders over hips, 90-degree angles at hips and knees, with a slight inward curve in your lower back. Hips should touch the back of the chair, and feet should be flat on the floor. Crossing your legs interferes with circulation.



Standing

Stand so your ears are aligned above your shoulders, shoulders over hips, hips over ankles, with a slight inward curve in your lower back.



Lying Down

Sleep on your side on a mattress that supports you but isn't too hard. Use a pillow that supports and aligns your neck.