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A PATIENTS GUIDE TO:
Posture for a Healthy Back: Sitting,
Driving and Sleeping

Posture for a Healthy Back: Sitting, Driving and Sleeping

What is the correct way to sit?

1. Sit up with your back straight and your shoulders back. Your buttocks should touch the back of your chair.
2. All three normal back curves should be present while sitting. A small, rolled-up towel or a lumbar roll can be used to help you maintain the normal curves in your back.
3. Here's how to find a good sitting position when you're not using a back support or lumbar roll:
 - a. Sit at the end of your chair and slouch completely
 - b. Draw yourself up and accentuate the curve of your back as far as possible.
 - c. Hold for a few seconds
 - d. Release the position slightly (about 10 degrees). This is a good sitting posture.
4. Distribute your body weight evenly on both hips.
5. Bend your knees at a right angle. Do not sit with your knees crossed. Keep your knees even with or slightly higher than your hips.
6. Keep your feet flat on the floor.
7. Try to avoid sitting in the same position for more than 30 minutes.
8. At work, adjust your chair height and work station so you can sit up close to your work and tilt it up at you. Rest your elbows and arms on your chair or desk, keeping your shoulders relaxed.
9. When sitting in a chair that rolls and pivots, don't twist at the waist while sitting. Instead, turn your whole body.
10. When standing up from the sitting position, move to the front of the seat of your chair. Stand up by straightening your legs. Avoid bending forward at your waist. Immediately stretch your back by doing 10 standing backbends.

It is ok to assume other sitting positions for short periods of time, but most of your sitting time should be spent as described above so there is minimal stress on your spine.

What is the correct way to sit while driving?

1. Use a back support (lumbar roll) at the curve of your back. Your knees should be at the same level or higher than your hips. "

2. Move the seat close to the steering wheel to support the curve of your back. The seat should be close enough to allow your knees to bend and your feet to reach the pedals.

What is the best position for sleeping and lying down?

The best lying or sleeping position may vary, depending on your symptoms. No matter what position you lie in, the pillow should be under your head, but not your shoulders, and should be a thickness that allows your head to be in a normal position. "

1. Try to sleep in a position which helps you maintain the curve in your back (such as on your back with a pillow under your knees or a lumbar roll under your lower back; or on your side with your knees slightly bent). Do not sleep on your side with your knees drawn up to your chest. You may want to avoid sleeping on your stomach, especially on a saggy mattress, since this can cause back strain and can be uncomfortable for your neck.

2. Select a firm mattress and box spring set that does not sag. If necessary, place a board under your mattress. You can also place the mattress on the floor temporarily if necessary. If you've always slept on a soft surface, it may be more painful to change to a hard surface. Try to do what's most comfortable for you.

3. Try using a back support (lumbar support) at night to make you more comfortable. A rolled sheet or towel tied around your waist may be helpful.

4. When standing up from the lying position, turn on your side, draw up both knees and swing your legs on the side of the bed. Sit up by pushing yourself up with your hands. Avoid bending forward at your waist.

Back Support When Sitting

While sitting is easier than standing, sitting for long periods of time with poor posture, can be tough on the back. When you sit, you transfer the full weight of your upper body onto your buttocks and thighs. Good posture is important to transmit those loads appropriately.

Consider getting up to stretch or elevate your feet if you have to sit for prolonged periods. This will help with blood circulation to your legs and prevent pooling of blood in your legs.

For people with back pain, sitting for prolonged periods can be particularly challenging. This is why having adequate back support when sitting is so important. Here's why.

How we sit

Good posture occurs when the spine is in a neutral position - when the normal curves of the spine have the least amount of stresses on them and support is evenly shared by the discs, bones, and ligaments. However, most people do not maintain good posture when sitting. This increases pressure on the lower back and can cause or worsen back and neck pain.

The key is to maintain good posture while sitting. But it's more than just sitting up straight. Check out your posture right now, are your:

- Feet flat on the floor (not crossed or tucked under you)?
- Back and shoulders against the backrest of the chair?
- Elbows and lower arms resting lightly on the armrests?
- Shoulders relaxed and slightly dropped (not hunched forward)?
- Hips slightly higher than your knees?
- Knees bent comfortably (there should be 2-4 inches between the back of your knees and the edge of the chair)?
- Eyes facing the computer screen?

It is important that all three normal back curves be present while you are sitting, especially for people who sit for long periods of time. A small, rolled-up towel or a lumbar support pillow is a great way to help you maintain good sitting posture and avoid spinal stress.

Add support to your chair

Does the chair you are sitting on have enough lumbar support? The backrest should fit into the natural curve of your lower back, filling in the space between your back and the back of the chair. This helps avoid excess pressure on the spine and makes it easier to maintain good sitting posture.

Adequate lumbar support also helps prevent muscle fatigue, which causes many people to lean their heads and upper backs too far forward or to slouch downward. With good lower back support, spinal muscles are relaxed and the spine is able to maintain its neutral position.

Many chairs have built-in lumbar support; some even allow you to adjust the amount of support by turning a knob on the side of the chair. This is a nice feature if more than one person uses the chair, as it allows each person to custom fit the support to his or her body.

If your chair does not have a backrest with adequate lumbar support, use a rolled-up towel or consider purchasing a lumbar backrest insert. Relax The Back offers many these products including the Self-Inflating Backrest, which expands to fit the lower back, plus it enables you to adjust the pressure and firmness of the support while you are using it.



Self-Inflating Back Rest - Bow Tie

It also has the added benefit of being ultra portable and can fit into a briefcase or purse. Relax The Back also carries lumbar support rolls and other support devices, even a lumbar/cervical support pillow with temperature sensitive memory foam that conforms to your body's contours and relieves pressure on your lower back or neck area. By making sure your spine has all the support it needs, you can end your day in comfort instead of pain.

Correcting Sitting Posture and Instruction in Proper Lifting Techniques

The Physician may have identified poor, or slouched sitting posture during the initial examination, which is most often the case. The Physician can instruct the patient in proper sitting posture using a lumbar roll, which is a special pillow designed to maintain the "lordotic curve," or hollow, in the low back. This correction of sitting posture assists in minimizing the onset of pain.

The instruction can also include applying the concept of posture correction to sitting in a car, at the office, and any other place specific to the patient's daily routine. Interrupting prolonged sitting posture with breaks to walk to the fax machine or to the copier on a regular basis would also be appropriate.

Instruction in proper bending and lifting is important. Activities that require repetitive or sustained bending, like gardening, aggravate the patient's symptoms. These activities should be temporarily avoided until the pain is under control. As the person is able to resume bending, education in proper bending and lifting techniques can be provided in order to prevent the onset of low back pain during this episode as well as to prevent future episodes.

Even though there are specific activities the patient should avoid, there are a multitude of activities in which the patient can participate pain free, talk with your Physician about which are appropriate for you. However, it is critical that AFTER the patient exercises, the patient should be cautious to maintain good sitting posture, as it is often the case that a patient will feel good while exercising, but develop low back pain a few hours later when sedentary.