

Perfect Position

Angela Fedrick Lewis

CHANGING YOUR
POSTURE CAN LEAD
TO BETTER HEALTH.

While slouching may damage your chances of walking the runway, bad posture isn't all aesthetics—it can actually damage your health, too. According to the American Chiropractic Association, at least 80 percent of Americans suffer from neck and back pains in their lifetime due to poor posture. Janice Novak, author of *Posture, Get It Straight* and director of improveyourposture.com, says poor posture is a major contributor to osteoarthritis and other common health ailments.

"Posture very much affects how you look and feel," says Novak. "If you have ever caught your reflection from a side view and your head does not sit directly over your shoulders, the muscles in your neck and back are being overworked and the mid-back is getting weaker."

According to Novak, such tightening and weakening of muscles can cause poor blood circulation and create alignment problems that impact normal body functions.

"When you slump, the rib cage rests on your lungs and decreases breathing capacity by as much as 30 percent," she says. "Every cell in your body needs oxygen, and a decreased breathing capacity can lessen brain function, energy and overall well-being."

Additionally, Novak says an improved posture may decrease your waistline by as much as two inches and lessen anxiety since proper alignment improves breathing, which triggers the release of stress-relieving hormones.

"Your body learns what you teach it," says



Earth Medicine

Stop and smell the rose beds to better your mood.

Ever wonder why spending time in nature makes you feel better? Findings from a recent study conducted by researchers at The Sage Colleges in New York discovered that being outdoors exposes you to a natural bacterium found in soil called *Mycobacterium vaccae*, which is known to increase serotonin (also known as the "happiness hormone") levels when ingested.

—Iman Folayan



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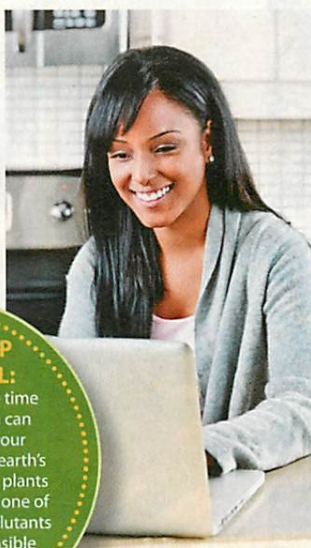
Smile! Spending more time planting your garden can help regulate both your temperament and the earth's temperature. Trees and plants absorb carbon dioxide, one of the greenhouse gas pollutants believed to be responsible for global warming.

Doc Com

Social networks take health from the waiting room to the chat room.

You've been prescribed a new medicine, but you want a second opinion. Well, you're in luck; now you can get a million opinions from people just like you. With Web sites such as wellescent.com and patientslikeme.com, you can connect with others who share your health condition or concerns. Users can create a profile, join health forums, discover alternative treatments and share their experiences—all without the doctor jargon. Plus, with accounts from real people, you can find comfort in knowing you're not alone.

—I. F.



"Unless a spinal injury has occurred, it does not matter your age or how long you had poor posture, it can always be improved."

Steven Weiniger, D.C., author of *Stand Taller-Live Longer, An Anti-Aging Strategy* and managing partner of bodyzone.com. "Muscles can adapt and get stronger to moving in a way that's not proper alignment. Muscles become strong at working at those angles, so your body has to balance itself in a way that we call 'poor posture.'"


Atlantan Akilah Scott found this to be true, as rounded shoulders and a slightly arched back plagued her childhood.

"I often walked on my toes as a child and that was comfortable for me," says the 36-year-old, who developed the habit to take the pressure off of her back.

While this and other routine habits like prolonged sitting and even texting—where your neck and back slump toward your phone—are common causes of poor posture, simple changes can improve it. Weiniger recommends daily posture exercises to strengthen weakened muscles and retrain the way your body balances itself. Balancing with one leg lifted so that your thigh is parallel to the floor while taking five slow breaths is one way to challenge muscles while improving posture (go to upscalemagazine.com for additional exercises).

Also, Pilates, yoga and working out with resistance bands are good routines to strengthen muscles and alignment, whereas back braces can actually weaken your posture. By making posture improvement a conscious around-the-clock effort—even while you're asleep, Novak advises always keeping your head level with your spine—you could be on your way to straight and narrow living.

"Unless a spinal injury has occurred, it does not matter your age or how long you had poor posture, it can always be improved," she says.

Scott, who says she has felt less neck and back pain after three months of Pilates and strengthening techniques, is routinely improving her rounded-shoulder posture by "staying on her toes" when it comes to body training and off of them when walking. 

A New Change

Swap out your old baby mat for this eco-friendly one.

Unlike some changing pads, the environmentally friendly Oshi foam mat is 100 percent free of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a synthetic compound found in everyday plastics. Not only are PVC plastics hard to recycle, a study of 10,851 children by the national nonprofit Center for Health, Environment and Justice found a link between the presence of PVC and higher rates of asthma. Add to the equation the mat's colorful design options and bacteria-resistant properties, and it might be the perfect compromise for mom and Mother Nature (\$52 | oshimat.com).

—Jordan Harris

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According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the PVC industry is responsible for the majority of the nation's vinyl chloride emissions, which is an odorless carcinogen released in the production of PVC.



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