

Sit up straight, shoulders back, chest out and chin tucked in

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At Tudor Physiotherapy we see a diverse range of conditions and complaints. In previous issues we have considered some of the common sports injuries and in children, those problems that are the result of rapid growth and poor alignment. The focus in this article is poor posture and what you can do to help yourself.

Posture is the position in which we stand, sit and move and generally speaking the longer we adopt a poor posture the more likely that we will develop symptoms. Good posture should see us maintain and where possible support the natural curves of the spine. It allows the spine stability and therefore provides a solid foundation for movement. If we adopt a poor posture then muscles have to overwork to maintain a position, they tire quickly and then become painful. An example of this may be sitting in a slouched position with rounded shoulders. The weight of the head then causes the muscles in the shoulders and upper back to overwork and therefore generate tension. Long periods of time spent at computers and activities such as driving and carrying heavy bags can cause excessive neck pain, upper & mid back tension, shoulder impingement (where the soft tissues that pass through the joint become pinched) and referred arm pain from trapped or irritated nerves.

Physiotherapy assessment will determine the structures involved and treatment will often involve a combination of manual therapy (such as massage and joint mobilisation) and postural re-education. The good news is that a lot of these exercises can be performed at your desk and can be a good self-help strategy to prevent symptoms in the first place - so give them a go:

Scapula setting:

Sit upright, pull shoulder blades together and down the back to 50% of their maximum movement, hold 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.

Chin tucks:

Sit upright, tuck the chin in to create a false double chin, hold 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.

Mid back rotations:

Sit upright with arms crossed, rotate to the left and right holding for 5 seconds at the extremes of movement, repeat 5 times each side.

Neck rotations:

Sit upright, look over alternate shoulders and hold 5 seconds at the extreme of movement, repeat 5 times each side.

It is also important to consider the work space. The following are recommendations for your desk set up:

Elbows level with the keyboard. This will position your wrists at the correct angle
 Feet flat on the floor with knees at a minimum angle of 90 degrees. Adjust your chair to support your back. The top of the screen should be level with your eyes and directly in front of you. The keyboard should be at the front of your desk to prevent overreaching, leaving room for the wrists to be supported. Any documents should be at screen level on the same side as your dominant eye. The telephone etc, should be within easy reach.

I have highlighted some of the variables which can be controlled to help prevent workstation injury and also some exercises that may help combat the effects of prolonged and poor postures. If symptoms do occur and are not easily improved with self-help measures it is important that you consult professionals such as us at Tudor Physiotherapy. Our highly qualified and experienced team will provide a thorough assessment, diagnose the problem and put in place a management strategy. Call our reception team on 01789 200935.

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