

# Posture

We are often told by well-meaning people to stand up straight or stop slouching at the table. While this is often viewed with annoyance, problems with poor posture over time can put undue pressure on muscles and ligaments and can cause the spine to become fixed in abnormal positions. Good posture on the other hand means training your body to stand, walk, sit and lie in positions that put the least strain on your body and reduces the likelihood of experiencing muscular pain.

## What is Posture?

Posture is the ability for your body to be aligned, using the least possible energy to maintain that position. When your body is aligned, your body is closest to your centre of gravity and so requires the least possible effort on the muscles and joints.

Poor sitting and standing habits are very common, and the NHS Choices website identifies several common mistakes that most of us make day to day, with accompanying advice on how to fix them.

**Slouching in a chair.** While this can be a more comfortable way to sit, slouching can, over time, put strain on muscles and sensitive tissue, causing muscular back pain. Sitting correctly, especially at work, is important even though it may feel uncomfortable at first.

**Leaning on one leg.** This position may most comfortable when standing for long periods of time, but it puts undue pressure on the lower back and hip which can cause muscle imbalances to develop. Instead you should use your core and buttock muscles to stand up straight with your weight evenly distributed on both legs.

**Hunched back.** This is also known as 'text neck', where your posture is warped by constantly hunching over a keyboard. This is a position that can lead to forming rounded shoulders and a weak upper back. A similar problem caused by sitting incorrectly over a laptop is a **poking out chin**, which can also cause problems with your posture over time.

## Sticking your bottom out

Regularly wearing high heels, or excessive weight gain around the waist can both be the cause of a pronounced curve of the lower back. To correct this standing posture you should try stand in a way so that your body is in perfect alignment with your neck straight and shoulders parallel with your hips.

## Flat back

This is where your lower back is flat where it should have a natural curve, leading your shoulders to become stooped and rounded. This is often caused by muscle imbalances as a result of sitting down too long and tends to make the head and shoulders lean forward, causing upper back and neck pain.

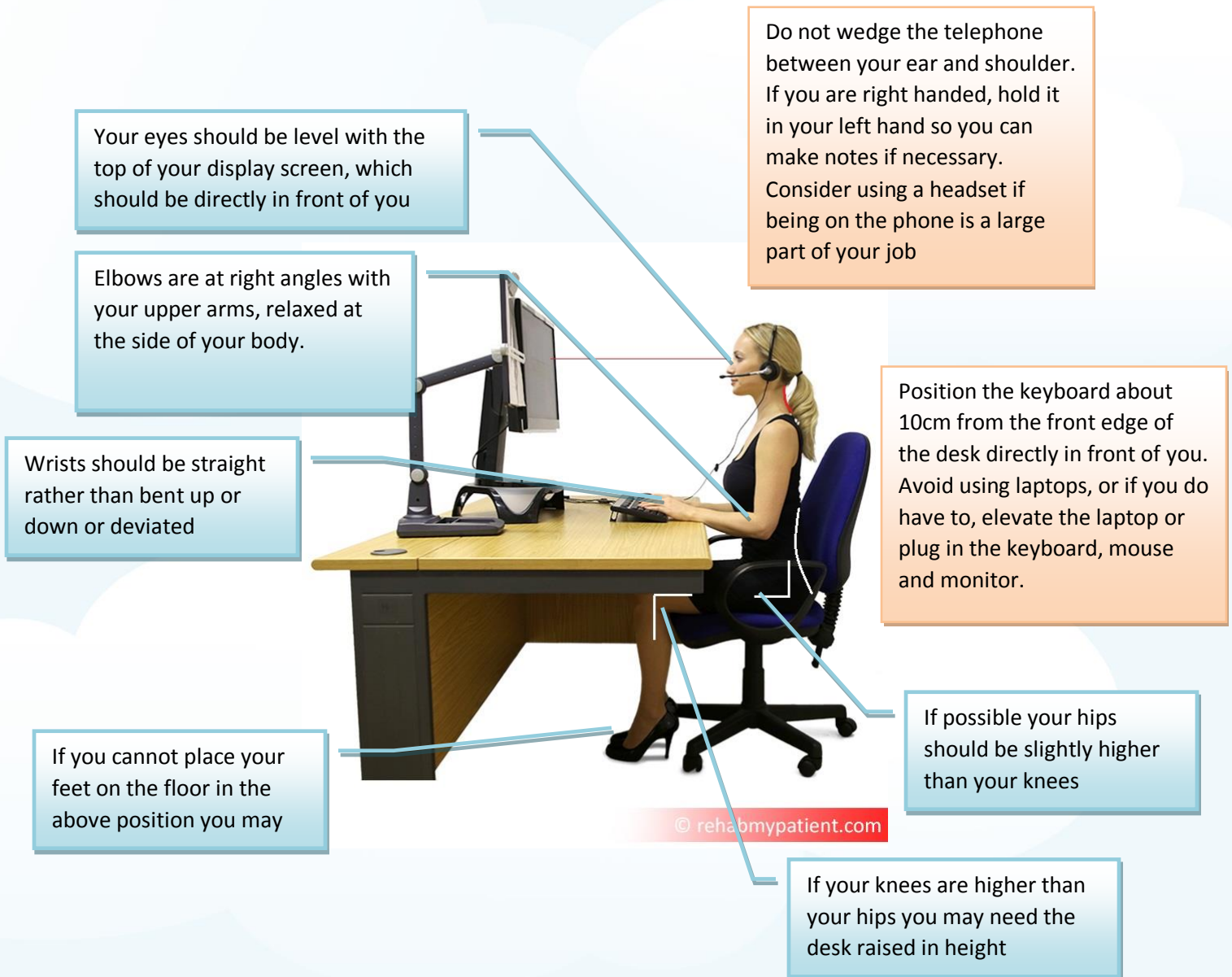
## Good posture at work

With most jobs involving long periods of sitting in front of a computer or a laptop, many back and neck problems often result from incorrect posture over a prolonged period. If you have a job where you are sedentary for most of the day it is important to correct poor sitting habits and to regularly move around as much as possible.

The NHS advises that your lower back should be properly supported by correctly adjusting your chair and that your feet should rest flat on the floor. Your computer screen should be at eye level to prevent

hunching and your keyboard should be about four to six inches (100mm-150mm) in front of you to rest your wrists between periods of typing.

If you are in the habit of using a phone regularly, to save cradling the phone between your head and neck, the NHS advises investing in a headset or another handsfree option.



- Lift your screen to position the top 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the monitor at eye level. Many people have their monitor too low. Buy a screen raiser if you cannot get your screen high enough.
- An adjustable ergonomic chair will help maintain good posture.
- Make sure your hips are higher or level to your knees. Try to position your knee and hip angle at 90 degrees.
- Ensure the chair is the correct height, and you can slide your knees under the table.
- Place your elbows at 90 degrees by positioning your keyboard not too far or too close from your body.
- Use a document holder to prevent repetitive neck bending.

- Use a hands-free telephone headset can also assist with maintaining good posture at work.

### Exercises to improve posture

The best way to improve your posture is to focus on exercises that strengthen core muscles, primarily those of the abdomen (core) and back. Pilates and yoga are excellent for this as they target the entire core with slow and controlled movements. Swimming is also a recommended exercise to correct posture as good posture is key to swimming well.



### Tips:

- Reduce laptop use. Prolonged laptop use often causes neck ache. Switch to a desktop, or attached a monitor to your laptop.
- Lift your head while you are walking. Try to keep your eyes on the horizon line. This will help to bring back your head and lift your chest up.
- Avoid leaning on one side of your body regularly. Try to balance evenly through both feet.
- Avoid carrying heavy bags one shoulder. Either reduce the load in your bag by emptying unnecessary items, or use a bag with two straps like a rucksack.
- Avoid sitting down for too long at any one time. Try to get up and move every 30 minutes to prevent joint stiffness and slouching.
- Reduce stress and tension. This will help reduce muscle tightness and hunching of your shoulders.
- Exercise regularly to maintain muscle strength and fitness.