

POSTURE PERFECT

PERFORMING DAILY ROUTINES FOR MAXIMUM FITNESS BENEFITS

Upright posture does more than simply help you look good. Proper posture—weight centered over your hips—head and chest held high; chin, abdomen, buttocks pulled in; and feet placed firmly on the ground—places the less strain on your body and assists you circulation.

A large number of ligaments and muscles contribute to stability and movement at the lower back. Which is often the location of problems because it is the focal stress point for body parts that are stacked vertically? In many cases, problems such as inflexibility go unnoticed until trauma occurs, as from lifting. Lifting with your knees straight and your back bent places tremendous stress on your lower back. Even a healthy lower back can be overstressed easily from improper lifting.

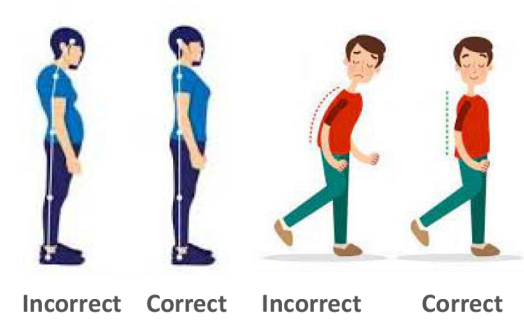
When you lift something heavy from the floor, your back should be erect and your knees bent. Your lower trunk—leg muscles should exert the force needed for the lift. A wide leather weight-lifting belt stabilizes the hip joints and diffuses the focus of stress throughout your lower trunk. A major cause of injury during lifting is rotational movement, so maintaining balance is imperative.

Body alignment. Especially that of the lower back. Influences foot strike, which has tremendous implications with respect to injury and running efficiency. Good posture helps avoid both insufficient pronation of the foot, which can increase shock to your feet, legs and lower back which can cause pelvic instability and which can cause overuse injuries such as shin splints. When your back is erect during running.

Your body is in the most favorable position for your legs to bring you forward. This requires less energy for any given running speed. A very helpful hint is to keep your head up and your eyes focused well ahead to help keep your back erect.

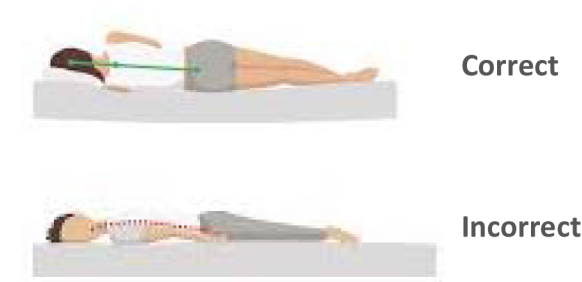
Lower back pain is one of the leading health problems in t his country and even highly fit and powerful athletes are susceptible. One of the many possible causes is improper posture. For example, when the abdominal muscles are weak, the abdomen may protrude, causing the pelvis to tilt downward in the front and upward in the rear.

Standing and walking



Try to toe straight ahead when walking: Put most of your weight on your heels; Hold your chest forward and elevate the front of the pelvis as if walking up an incline. Avoid wearing high heels. Stand as if you are trying to touch the ceiling with the top of your head, eyes straight ahead. All the elements of good posture will flow from these simple maneuvers.

Sleeping



Sleep on a firm mattress: a 3/4 inch plywood bed board is helpful and should be used with all but a very firm Orthopedic mattress. With acute back pain, sleep with a pillow or blanket rolled under the knees and a pillow under the head. Keep your knees and hips bent when sleeping on your side.

Working



Try to avoid fatigue caused by work requiring long standing. Flex hips and knees by occasionally placing a foot on a stool or bench.

Take exercise breaks from desk work by getting up, moving around and performing a few back exercises in the standing position.

Driving



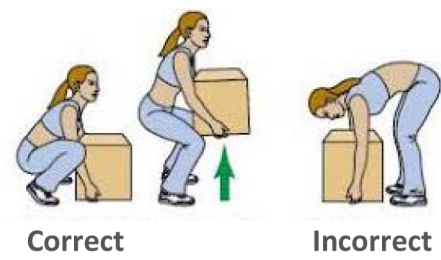
Use a firm seat with a padded plywood or special seat support. Sit close to the wheel with knees bent. On long trips, stop every one to two hours and walk to relieve tension and relax muscles.

Imbalance puts undue stress on the pelvis and lower back in which case it causes a postural and/or structural compensation. This can lead to poor posture—such as "swayback" or "hunchback".

Maintaining equilibrium through good posture during movement has special significance during exercise. Your body has a number of reflexes—automatic responses—that help you keep your balance. For example, if you lean forward too far, you will eventually step forward to prevent yourself from falling. Training appears to enhance these postural reflexes: well-trained dancers. Gymnasts, and divers can perform their spins, somersaults, and tumbles with minimum loss of balance.

Strengthening your back through exercise and good posture will not only increase your performance as an athlete, but will also make you look and feel better. And as always. if minor aches or pain persist—consult your physician.

Lifting



Bend your knees ; squat and lift with your thigh muscles, not your back. Never bend over with your knees straight and lift with the upper torso. Move slowly and avoid sudden movements. Try to avoid lifting loads in front of you above the waist line . Avoid bending over to lift heavy objects from car trunks, as this places a strain on low back muscles.