



# Stop back pain!

Everyone complains of stiffness and body aches now and then, but if it happens frequently, you may need some professional help to improve your poor posture

BY JANICE CHAN VEY LIAN

**A** POORLY set up working space, neck constantly bent over a smartphone or tablet, and repetitive movements like bending and twisting throughout the day to care for the kids and keep a busy home running smoothly are all familiar scenarios in daily life.

Unfortunately, these habits can cause a variety of aches and pains that worsen over time and lead to chronic musculoskeletal pain. In conjunction with World Spine Day 2023, an annual event to help raise awareness about spine health, we would like to shed some light on putting a S.T.O.P. to back pain.

## S = SIT UP STRAIGHT AND STRETCH!

The main factors involved are poor posture and lifestyle habits, as we are often not conscious about our posture and how we carry out daily tasks, from how we use digital devices to how we lift and/or bear heavy things.

In many instances, this is compounded by pandemic-related disruptions such as studying/working from home as well as changes in our lifestyle and career that we were not well-prepared for. To help prevent musculoskeletal pain, we need to be mentally aware of our posture. As simple as it sounds, sitting up straight and stretching regularly can help.

## T = TAKE A BREAK

The theme for World Spine Day 2023 is 'Move Your Spine'. While most people already understand that they need to move regularly, this needs to translate into action, so we advise setting a timer for scheduled reminders to get up and move your spine.



## O = ORGANISE

Try some of these tips to organise your home and work space for better posture:

- Adjust the height of your computer screen to eye level using books or sturdy boxes
- Enlarge the view and brightness of your screen so you can see and read without having to lean forward
- Use a chair with good back support, placed at a height that allows your feet to rest flat on the floor with knees bent at a 90-degree angle
- Use a stool to avoid squatting while gardening or bathing babies
- Place needed items within easy reach to minimise bending and/or twisting at the waist. For example, parents of

- babies and young children can sit on the bed to change diapers instead of standing and bending over at the waist
- Manage heavy loads by packing lightly and/or using a bag made of a lighter material
- Distribute weight evenly. As a general rule, carry less than 10 per cent of our body weight, evenly distributed across both shoulders. Backpacks (when worn properly) allow both shoulders to bear the weight or switch sides regularly when carrying a handbag or tote
- Carry smaller or lighter loads and make several trips rather than lifting one large, heavy load
- Use the correct posture - lift using your knees, place frequently used items as close to you as possible, and place heavy items on higher levels
- Learn proper fitness and exercise techniques by enlisting the help of a trainer; if needed, ask their advice on how to modify your workout to prevent strain or injury

## P = PROFESSIONAL HELP

"Many people who see a chiropractor have problems like scoliosis and back pain. We help to identify likely problems and recommend ways to improve spine health. These may include alignment of the spine, helping to improve your range of movement, optimising how you perform your daily tasks, or changing how your working space is organised to reduce overall strain on your body and prevent injury.

Many people are looking for a quick solution but it must be understood that most types of musculoskeletal pain are built up over time hence it will take time to address these problems. The good thing is, these changes need not be drastic or expensive. I always advise immediate and sustainable minor adjustments, which you can do right now, with what you have around the house.

The most important thing is for patients to communicate their problems, needs and expectations for treatment. Many times, patients are reluctant to speak up and this will impact the outcome, so my #1 advice would be: Make sure you are clear about what you want and if you are not sure, keep asking." - **The Health**

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