

Are you sitting comfortably?

An expert's advice



Will Kenton, Head of Physiotherapy at Teladoc Health UK provides some guidelines on how to set up our workstations correctly to reduce the stress and strain on our necks and backs.

We often hear posture blamed for our aches and pains, but is this necessarily true?

Posture is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "the position in which you hold your body when standing or sitting". It's important to remember that posture is dynamic, thus the premise that someone can have bad posture has no basis given we can easily modify and adapt our position.

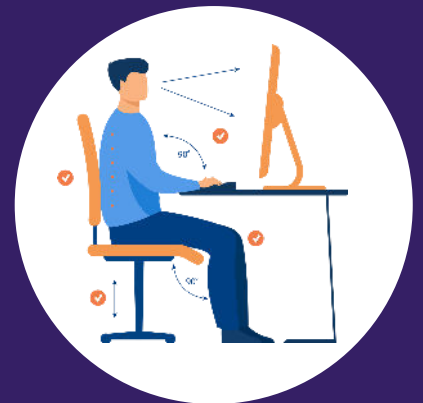
Is there a correlation between posture and pain?

It's true that sedentary office workers unfortunately have a higher prevalence to back and/or neck pain. In any given year 43.69% of these individuals will experience pain with a further 17-27% developing persistent pain for longer than three months. The impact of this extends beyond the experience of pain itself, with sufferers having a higher prevalence of anxiety and depression and are also more likely to take time off work. Our posture, however, is not a predictor or evidenced to increase the likelihood of suffering with Musculoskeletal pain. What is reassuring is that there are practical steps we can all take to help minimize our chances of experiencing musculoskeletal pain or injury.

Getting our workstation set up correctly

When we're unable to be moving we want to make sure we've got the best workstation ergonomic set up possible. This can help reduce the stress and strain on our body which may have a contributing factor to experiencing pain or discomfort.

In the ideal set up your lower back will be in contact with the chair with a straight line through your spine, shoulders and hips. Aim to sit straight-on without rotation of the body. Your feet should be firmly on the ground and supported by a footrest. Your knees should be bent to around 90 degrees with a gap between the back of your knee and the chair. Lastly, aim to key your eyes level with the top of your screen with your forearms and wrists supported in a 'neutral' position.



How often should I change my posture?

Although there is no perfect answer research agrees we need to be moving more often. The benefits help reduce tensile stress in the muscles, lubrication of the body's joints, improve our circulation and also support digestion. As a rule of thumb try to do 20 seconds of movement for every 20 minutes of sitting. If sitting for longer, say 30 or 50 minutes, then look to increase your movement time to about 2-10 minutes respectively. It might be as simple as standing up, going for a short walk, stretching or doing some yoga. Take a meeting or call on the go if you can.

The key is that we change our posture with movement. If we're consistent in our activity breaks it can have a significant benefit in helping limit potential musculoskeletal discomfort. If you do experience back or neck pain, it is best to seek the advice and care of a physiotherapist.