

Patient information factsheet

Improving your posture

A guide for adults with cystic fibrosis

What is good posture?

Posture is the position of your body when you sit or stand. The picture opposite shows what good posture looks like (what we call a neutral spine position). When you look at a spine from behind it should look like it runs in a straight line but when viewed from the side, it should have natural curves.

Why is good posture important?

Good posture allows us to sit or stand with minimal effort and without causing strain on our bodies; it also helps us to avoid developing pain and stiffness.

What causes poor posture?

There are two types of poor posture. One is where poor posture is correctable; the second is where posture is fixed and restricts movement.

The correctable posture is usually caused by sitting or standing in a slouched position, as many of us do, and your body gets used to this position. You may also find that repeated coughing causes you to adopt poor postural positions more often and, as a result, your back may become stiff and weak.

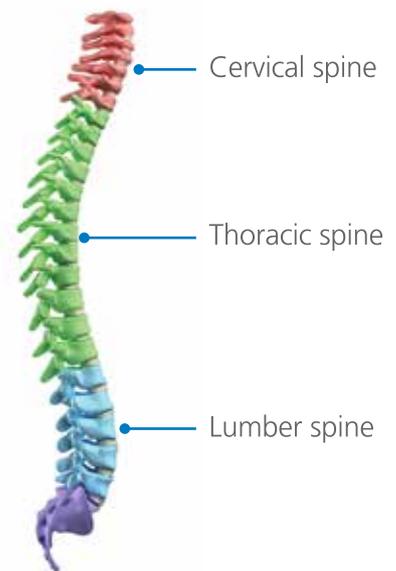
At times when breathing is more difficult, your muscles are working harder to meet this demand so they aren't able to do the job of controlling your posture as effectively. As a result you can develop a fixed posture.

Which muscles help our posture?

The muscles that help to maintain good posture are called core muscles and by practicing some core stability training, we can strengthen these muscles and improve our posture. Core muscle activity can sometimes improve with just doing everyday activities or our usual exercise. Some people, however, need to do specific exercises to 'switch on' their core muscles.

What causes stiffness?

When the spine isn't in the correct position some muscles will become tight and others will stretch. This can happen over a long period of time and will cause the little joints in the spine and ribs to become stiff. Stiff joints can be painful and can sprain more easily when we cough, lift or move suddenly.



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What causes weakness?

The core muscles can work for a long time without getting tired but if you have poor posture, other muscles have to take up the slack. These muscles aren't designed to work for long periods of time so they can quickly become tired and tense. This tension can cause pain.

How do I find a 'neutral spine' position?

To sit in a good position you have to find your neutral spine position. To find this position

1. sit and move your hips/pelvis forwards
2. and then move them backwards
3. stop in the mid position - you should now feel all of your weight going through your sitting bones.

If you sit for long periods of time in the car, at work or on the sofa, a small folded up towel placed behind the small of your back may help keep your back in the neutral spine position. You can then sit with your upper back supported by the chair.

How do I switch on my core stability muscles?

Once your spine is in the neutral position it's easier to 'switch on' your core muscles. Try to gently pull in your lower tummy muscles (not your 'six pack' muscle) and pull up your pelvic floor (see our pelvic floor leaflet). You shouldn't be tensing any other muscles and your breathing should remain normal and relaxed.

Good sitting posture

It is good to try to adjust your workstation so that your body is fully supported and in a good position.



Good standing posture

Stand in a neutral spine position and then gently lift your breastbone up. You may need to bring your shoulders back and down. Take care not to over correct your posture as shown below. To check your posture, stand in front of a mirror looking at yourself from the side.



- you should have your weight spread evenly through both feet
- your ankle, knee, hip and ear lobe should be in line
- your shoulders should be back and relaxed

If your back is stiff, you will need to do some simple back flexibility exercises to improve your posture. Please ask for the *Exercises to improve your posture* leaflet.

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Tips

Correcting your posture takes time and in the beginning you may only be able to hold a good posture for a few seconds. However, practise really does make perfect so keep trying regularly throughout the day.

Remember that you should not hold a rigid posture as this will start to cause stiffness too. Your posture should feel comfortable and you should still be able to slump to put on your shoes. Try not to sit or stand still for too long and if you work at a desk, make sure you regularly stand and stretch.

We're here to help

If you have any concerns about your posture or your back is too stiff to do the stretches, then please book an appointment with the musculoskeletal physiotherapists.

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