

... MAY 2008 ...
QUICK TAKES



Stand Up *Almost* Straight

Maintaining the natural curves of your spine while standing, called "neutral" posture, will help to protect your back from injury.

For perfect posture follow these steps:

- Stand with your feet slightly apart and your knees slightly bent. Your weight should be evenly distributed on both feet.
- Keep your head up with your shoulders back and relaxed. Avoid tilting your head too far forward, back, or to the side.
- Lift your chest and tighten your abdominal muscles. Try not to stand for long periods of time.
- If you do have to stand for awhile, resting one foot on a stool or box will help take the pressure off your back; switch legs every 20 minutes.

Ergonomics *Can it help your back?*

Simple changes in the way you carry yourself may ease an aching back. Whether we are at work, at home or traveling, prolonged sitting and other repeated activities take a toll on our bodies. Extended computer use is a major culprit. It can lead to common ailments such as carpal tunnel syndrome from constant use of a keyboard, low back pain from long periods of time spent sitting and eye fatigue from monitor glare. Ergonomics can help us to understand the source of our aches and pains and make changes in our behavior to ease them.

Here are some simple but powerful ways you can utilize ergonomics to ease your aches and pains:

- Be mindful of your posture and positioning.
- Set up your work environment to be friendlier to your body's needs.
- Take frequent breaks from sitting or any repeated movement or stance.
- Do targeted stretching and strengthening exercises.

The Science of Sitting – Watch your back!

Back pain is a very common complaint because there are so many of us who sit for prolonged periods of time in front of a computer, in a car, on public transportation or in front of the TV. The Division of Occupational Health and Safety (DOHS) reports "sitting for long periods of time can cause increased pressure on the intervertebral discs — the springy, shock-absorbing part of the spine." This pressure is created when the body is not holding itself in the correct position.

Positioning Yourself:

Below are guidelines to help you achieve the ideal sitting position.

Think right angles:

- Your torso and thighs should create a right angle:
 - Your torso should be upright and vertical.
 - Your thighs should be horizontal and parallel to the floor.
- Your arms should create a right angle:
 - Your upper arms should be vertical and parallel to your spine.
 - Your forearms should be horizontal and parallel to your thighs.
- Your legs should create a right angle:
 - Your thighs should be horizontal and parallel to the floor.
 - Your calves should be vertical and parallel to your spine.

Positioning Your Chair:

- Use a good chair.
 - Use a chair with casters so you can still move laterally while sitting.
 - Use a chair with a five-point base to reduce the likelihood of tipping.
 - Make sure your knees extend about two to three inches beyond the seat.
 - Rest your feet firmly on the ground. Use a footrest if your feet don't reach the floor.
- Use a backrest
 - Use a backrest to support the natural curve in your lower back. You can place a rolled up towel or pad against the back of your chair where your back naturally curves inward.
 - Make sure both your lower back and your shoulders touch the back of your chair.
- Use an armrest
 - Make sure your armrest is high enough so your arms can rest lightly on it but low enough that your shoulders are relaxed and dropped.
 - Don't rest your weight on your armrest.

Better Health

Better Strength =

Increasing your strength and using your muscles wisely can reduce strain.

One of the challenges for people who deal with pain is keeping the body strong and limber. Painful conditions make it harder to exercise; yet being inactive can actually worsen symptoms. Talk to your doctor and/or a fitness professional about safe ways for you to get more active.

Smart Exercise

Stretching and lengthening exercises can release stress and tension, which build up when the body sits or does any activity for a lengthy period of time. Yoga, Pilates and other strength-building exercises yield a stronger body, which is better able to sustain proper positioning.

Hayes Cunningham, B.S., D.C., an independent chiropractor in Los Angeles, emphasizes the importance of exercise in counteracting the negative effects of prolonged sitting and other activities. "Exercise, specifically spinal extension work, yoga, and body weight exercises, all assist the body in maintaining itself." Just be sure to



check with your doctor before starting any new exercise program.

Smart Lifting

Even when you're not exercising you can make an effort to use your muscles in healthier ways. You may have already heard the old saying "lift with your legs, not your back." This is certainly the golden rule of lifting safely. But there are a few other things to keep in mind when lifting as well. The DOHS suggests some basic guidelines for lifting:

- **Stay close:** Extending your arms while carrying something puts extra strain on your back. The closer to your body the load is, the easier on your back, so give whatever you're carrying a close hug!
- **Use your legs:** Your leg muscles are your biggest muscles and much more suited to lifting than the small muscles of the back. When reaching down to pick up an object, keep your back upright and squat down with your legs.
- **Use your stomach muscles:**

Tightening your tummy as you lift will help support your back. But don't forget to breathe.

- **Pivot on your feet if you need to turn:** Don't twist side to side

with your back. *range of motion*

Broccoli and Red Pepper Pasta

Makes: 4 servings | 20 minutes

The bright colors of this dish are a sign that it's rich in disease-fighting antioxidants.

Ingredients

- 3 roasted red peppers (from a jar)
- 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 cups broccoli florets
- 12 ounces multi-grain pasta, such as Barilla penne or rotini
- Olive oil cooking spray
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh garlic
- 2 vine-ripened tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 2 tablespoons sliced fresh basil leaves or
- 2 teaspoons dried basil
- 4 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Preparation

1. Place the peppers in a food processor or blender; add balsamic vinegar and crushed red pepper flakes. Puree until smooth.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add broccoli florets and cook for 1 minute. Scoop out the broccoli with a slotted spoon and set aside. Bring the water back to a boil. Cook pasta until al dente, about 8 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, spray a large skillet with cooking spray and place pan over medium-low heat. Add garlic and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and increase the heat to medium. When the tomatoes begin to simmer, stir in pepper puree and broccoli; cook for 2 minutes. Stir in basil and remove from the heat.
4. Drain the pasta and add to the skillet, stirring to coat.
5. Spoon into shallow bowls and garnish each with 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan.

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