

Conshohocken PHYSICAL THERAPY

Sports Medicine & Fitness

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POSTURE "Sit up straight"

By Desirea D. Caucci

If there was one thing your mom told you growing up that you should have listened to over the years, it was to "stand up straight"! As a Physical Therapist, this is one piece of advice that nearly every patient hears repeatedly in my office. Even *you* can correct your posture easily...try it now. Uncross your legs and sit with both feet firmly on the floor. Straighten your back to align your shoulders over your hips and sit on your butt bones, also called your ischial tuberosities. Next, align your ears over your shoulders by bringing your head straight backward and keeping your chin parallel to the floor (kind of like a turtle retracting into its shell). Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together. Lastly, pull your belly button inward toward your spine to stabilize your body in this position. This is how sitting should feel. If you have any neck or back discomfort after sitting at your desk or in the car all day (who doesn't, really?) these are simple modifications you can make to your posture to decrease and to potentially eliminate your discomfort.

The same rules apply with standing as well. Think about it from the floor-up: wear comfortable shoes, stand with an erect spine, align your ears back with your shoulders, gently squeeze your shoulder blades together and pull in your belly. Yes, this takes a little effort, but your bodies will thank you for it now and in the long run! In fact, you're probably noticing you feel better already.

If you exercise regularly, also keep these principles in mind. There is little benefit in performing any exercise when it is executed with poor posture and poor form. In fact, yoga and pilates, two exercise methods that I highly recommend, focus primarily on this very principal. Other exercises, such as walking, running and weight lifting, performed without first aligning your body could cause injury to those muscles that are being improperly stressed. Use mirrors in the gym or at home to guide yourself and to make sure you are positioning correctly. Mirrors are also helpful when teaching yourself how to align your sitting and standing posture initially; then, once it starts becoming more natural, there will be no need for this visual aid.

It is this corrected position from which all other bodily movements can most easily be made. Slouch and then attempt raising one arm up overhead. Now correct your posture and reach up, noticing how much farther you can move your arm. Also note the smooth quality of the movement with all of the muscles doing their job as they function in the positions they were meant to perform. This is just one simple example of how posture influences our movements. It is critical to maintain this posture on a daily basis and now is the best time to start undoing the mess that decades of poor posture

has caused. I believe that many of the people who enter my office would not have needed my services if they would have worked on improving their posture. This would have led to less strain on their muscles, preventing injury and, thus, preventing the very reason they came to me in pain. So, listen to your mother (and your Physical Therapist!) and you'll do your body a lot of good.

Now that I got you thinking about yourself and your own posture, this might be a good time to introduce you to the field of Physical Therapy. What is Physical Therapy, really? Probably a lot more than you think. Many people tell me that before I introduced them to Physical Therapy (PT), they thought of it as a service limited to treating people with serious injuries or to perform massage. While both of these certainly comprise a small portion of the services we provide, our scope of practice is much broader. PTs work with anyone who has pain (acute or chronic) and/or functional deficits. This means we see a wide variety of people in our offices; some may have just recently sprained their ankle or had surgery; some have chronic, debilitating pain, including headaches and migraine; some are healthy and want to utilize our expertise for a home exercise program; and still others come to improve their functional status with sports, balance or even just activities of daily living (dressing, walking, housework, etc.).

Of course I am biased, but in my opinion, Physical Therapists are even much more than the exhaustive list above. They are skilled healers, compassionate listeners, creative motivators, scientists, educators, patient advocates, medical health colleagues, fitness professionals, body experts and ultimately your friends.



Look for Dr. Desirea Caucci's weekly column in the *Conshohocken Recorder*. All her articles can be read at www.ConshyPT.com

Patient Buzz

"My treatment was outstanding at Conshy PT. I would definitely recommend this clinic to my family and friends- Good Job!"

- Aaron S.

"When I started Physical Therapy I couldn't even hold my balance. Now I can walk better and dance which I thought could never happen. Thank God for this physical therapist, she brought my life back."

- Dottie S.

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