

https://www.coastalpoint.com/lifestyle/health/how-you-sit-could-be-taking-a-toll-on-your-health/article_728c81bc-ac6f-11eb-9451-f37ec3ab66fb.html

How you sit could be taking a toll on your health

By Bob Cairo | Special to the Coastal Point
May 6, 2021



Whether you're sitting at a desk in an office, in a recliner while you work remotely, in a car or watching TV from the sofa, the results of how you're sitting can be a literal pain.

Coastal Point • Stock photo

What's your daily routine like? Do you start the day at the table with breakfast? Maybe you sit in front of the TV while having a cup of coffee or you sit down in front of the computer and check emails and posts.

Throughout the day, you may be one of those people who winds up spending a lot of time on the computer. If you're still working, your day may be spent sitting at a desk. When the evening comes, you likely have a routine for dinnertime and then spending the evening visiting with family or friends, reading or watching television. So, what's the point?

You probably don't even think about how often you sit, whether in the car, in the course of your daily routine or even when you enjoy entertainment spots and dining out. It's so much a part of what we do, few of us think about how much time we spend sitting down, and I bet you give no real thought to how you're sitting. But the fact is your sitting position can have a significant impact on your health.

Posture and ergonomics are important in any environment, because the stress you may be putting on your back, neck and shoulders can not only result in serious discomfort, but it can have long lasting implications for your health.

First things first: Let's take the mystery out of what ergonomics means.

It's just a way of referring to the design and fit of the space you are using, but it is very important. That space needs to fit you to avoid any risk of injury and do away with the pain that comes when you don't pay attention to it.

A big problem is that, more times than not, we are not fitting into the space we are using with the proper posture, so we're putting all kinds of stress on our backs, necks and shoulders.

You may not think much about it, but over time, poor posture evolves from everyday habits during activities, such as how we're sitting in office chairs or any variety of locations. We rarely think about how we are sitting when we are looking at our phones, using our laptops, tablets and computers, watching TV, driving or standing for long periods of time. This is a slippery slope.

If you've been having issues, how do you know posture and positioning could be causing that discomfort you've been experiencing?

One potential warning sign is back pain that seems to become more uncomfortable at certain times of the day. Think about it. Are these the times you are normally sitting at your computer or at your desk for long periods of time at work or at home? You might notice less pain on weekends, when you're not following that typical weekday routine. What about some of your hobbies? When you are doing your needlepoint or crossword puzzles, for example, do you start experiencing discomfort in your neck?

Another potential clue is the pain often starts in the neck and moves downwards into the upper back, lower back and extremities. The pain likely goes away once you start switching positions, whether you're standing or sitting. You might also notice pain if you get a new chair or change where you typically sit.

Here's the bottom line: If you have back pain that seems to come and go for months at a time, you need to pay attention.



What I want you to think about and understand is that it's very easy to make a habit of poor posture. When you do, that's a sure recipe for back, neck and shoulder pain, and it can also cause you to hunch over. The bottom line is this can not only lead to painful problems, but it can damage your spine.

Pain is no picnic, and if what we've been talking about sounds like your situation, it's time to act.

The first thing I want you to do is going to be no surprise, because you've heard me say this so many times. You need to see a doctor. Self-diagnosing can lead to bad conclusions, and bad conclusions can lead to bad mistakes that can be costly. If you don't have experience repairing cars, you're not going to be able to tell what's wrong with it and how to repair it properly. Why would you think about your body any differently when there's so much more to lose?

Prepare for the visit to your doctor by writing down important information that you don't want to forget to share. How long has this problem been going on? When did you first notice the problem? Is the pain worse during certain times than others? Write down every little bit of information, because it may seem insignificant to you, but it could hold important clues for your doctor that can help put together a full picture of the exact nature of your problem.

Your doctor will likely perform a thorough exam and may require a few tests or scans to get the complete picture of your health challenge. What comes next could very well be a referral to a physical therapist.

Your physical therapist will take a series of steps to get you back on track. The first thing that you can expect at your initial appointment with your physical therapist will be a review of the information your doctor sends. You can also expect a thorough evaluation and a detailed dialogue about what you've been experiencing.

All this information is very important in understanding your situation and putting together a customized plan. That plan will likely include hands-on therapy and exercises. They have two purposes: They are designed to correct your posture by building strength in the muscles that have been impacted with poor posture habits. They will also be focused on increasing your flexibility to reduce the strain you have been putting on your spine.

Your physical therapist may also discuss some simple changes you can make to address the big picture — the factors affecting your posture and ergonomics. You'd be surprised how many changes can be pretty easy to make.

For example, the more you sit in one position, the more tired your muscles become. This is when you tend to start slouching or slumping over to one side or another. A good way to fix that is to change your position, stretch, or if your mobility allows it, get up and move. Just a quick walk around the room will help.

When you're sitting, there's a right and a wrong way. From crossing your legs to tilting your head, these are just some of the issues that cause problems. Your physical therapist can teach you how to sit properly, how to align your body, and how to distribute your weight evenly when you stand to avoid the nasty discomfort that can result.

And don't be surprised if your physical therapist talks to you about simple ergonomic adjustments you can make. Something as simple as using a small pillow or a footrest when you are sitting could have a big impact. You may also need to take a good look at the kind of footwear you wear and the surfaces you stand on. Again, simple adjustments like a mat on a hard floor or selecting footwear with a different type of heel or support can result in great benefits.

The big takeaway here is pretty obvious. You need to be aware of your posture and the ergonomics in your space at home and away, so that you're not falling into the bad habits that can cause longterm damage. It's not hard. Let's do this. Isn't it worth some simple changes to preserve your quality of life and your mobility?

Now Open in Ocean View!



MERCER • SYDELL
DENTAL

Bob Cairo is a licensed physical therapist at Tidewater Physical Therapy. He can be reached by calling (302) 537-7260.