

# Stop Slouching! Poor Posture Means More Than Just Back Pain

Everyone, including your grandmother, who always reminded you to sit up straight, knows that good posture is essential. Poor posture can lead to back and neck pain, and it can also cause gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms such as acid reflux and other health issues.

“The more hunched forward you are, the more compressed your internal organs, including the GI tract. This constriction of the abdomen can lead to symptoms of GI upset and even acid reflux,” says [Dr. Joseph Gjolaj](#), orthopedic surgeon and spine expert with the University of Miami Health System.

An older woman, who suffered throughout her life from stomach issues, came to Dr. Gjolaj for scoliosis correction surgery. She had seen several physicians for acid reflux symptoms, as well as for intermittent bouts of constipation and diarrhea.

“By the time I saw her for surgery, she was on four different GI medications,” he says. “After about a month after surgery, she noticed that her GI symptoms had resolved and upon consultation with her GI specialist, she was able to discontinue all of her GI meds and remain symptom-free. Improvement of her longstanding GI symptoms was a pleasant and unexpected surprise after scoliosis surgery.”

## Back-to-back shifts

Your poor posture could be part of the reason you feel tired all the time. One reason may be that as you sit at your desk from nine to five, you put a strain on your spine. Once you are at home and in bed, that strain causes your back to hurt, which in turn affects the quality of your sleep.

[One study](#) found that sitting caused significantly more pressure on your lumbar discs than standing did, says Dr. Gjolaj. Specifically, sitting while leaning forward is the most stressful on your back. So, standing is a lot better on your back than sitting.

“There’s a preferred spinal alignment that we tolerate better than another kinds and sitting is not the preferred way to align your spine,” says Dr. Gjolaj.

Also, by not aligning your back correctly, you are causing your body to work harder. Your muscles have to work harder to keep you in a slouched position, says Dr. Gjolaj. “A good posture is a lot easier to sustain than a really poor posture.”

## **What is text neck?**

In 2014, [researchers](#) sought to explain text neck – the neck pain you feel by hunching over your phone for hours a day. They found that the average human head weighs approximately 10 – 12 pounds in a neutral position. But, when you hold your head down and forward, the weight your spine feels while trying to hold your head up increases dramatically. Just a 15-degree difference translates to your head weighing the equivalence of 27 pounds. At a 60-degree tilt, your head weighs 60 pounds.

That concept is called “flexion” when the head is bent forward like that, and it is not normal to maintain a flexed neck posture long periods of time, says Dr. Gjolaj. “The neck should be in a posture where it is actually bent back a little bit so that the head is fairly even with the shoulders,” he says.

## **The back pain blues**

It may seem like a stretch, but poor posture may also affect your mood. Or, more precisely, the pain that you’re in due to your posture. “As a spine surgeon, many patients whom I see before surgery are profoundly affected by pain, enough that

they are considering spine surgery,” says Dr. Gjolaj. “I can tell you from my own experience that many of those patients who are in chronic pain from spinal conditions are not in a good mood, due to their severe pain.”

He has seen patients who are profoundly depressed and desperate to have something be done. These patients come to him when other physicians won’t treat them due to the severity of their spine.

“A bad posture can lead to a bad back which can lead to profoundly bad depression,” Dr. Gjolaj says.

## **Keep it straight**

The good news? Your back pain from slouching is something you can – and should – fix.

Poor posture or hunching over can affect a lot of other things in the body, says Dr. Gjolaj. “Correcting a poor posture isn’t something that should be considered an afterthought,” he says. “It is something that should be considered a critical part to prevent future problems.”

To start, be mindful of your posture. Dr. Gjolaj suggests using reminders to sit up straight. Some devices connect to your smartphone and will detect when you are slouching over.

Don't use a back brace for an extended length of time, says Dr. Gjolaj. “It may give you an idea of what it feels like to have a good posture, but then you have to be able to mimic that with your own muscles.”

A physical therapist or a knowledgeable personal trainer can also help you improve your posture. “After you learn what the proper posture is, then building the muscle

strength and endurance to hold that posture throughout the day is essential. And that just takes exercise and practice,” says Dr. Gjolaj.

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