

## **SITTING**

Many people erroneously believe sitting to be an activity that demands little of the body. Big mistake. Sitting is a potentially destructive activity driving many health issues. Try to apply as many of these tips as possible:

- Sit with your knees at hip level.
- Stand up briefly after an hour of sitting, or even sooner if possible.
- Use the back rest. If you habitually perch on the edge of the chair sit back against the rest. If you tend to slouch use the back rest to sit up straighter.
- Sit with feet and face in the same direction.
- Sit with weight evenly distributed between both buttocks, not leaning/bending to one side.
- Avoid crossing the legs.
- Lumbar pillows or supports are not helpful for everyone. Only use one if you tend to sit slouched, and don't use one if you typically sit up very straight.
- Ball chairs – Again, not ideal for everyone. More suited to a person who tends to slump.
- Bleachers and stadium seats – use a lawn chair or stadium seat to put on the bleacher.

## **BENDING & LIFTING**

Maintaining a neutral spine is best. This means something between flexed/rounded and extended/arched. Movement should occur at the knees and hips, not in the spine. Keep the feet and face pointed in the same direction. Keeping the load being handled as close to the abdomen as possible reduces the work to the trunk and the chance of injury.

## **WALKING (gait)**

Problems in walking (pain, endurance, visible gait deviations) often signal a problem justifying evaluation by an experienced clinician. Normal gait consists of the following:

- Trunk rotation, arm swing, & forward facing feet
- Equal time on both feet, equal step length on each side.
- The heel striking the ground first and the toes leaving the ground last.
- The feet under the hips – no closer and no wider.
- No movement of the trunk to the right or the left (sidebending).
- Assistive device (walker, cane, crutches) – should only and always be used when 1) weight bearing on a limb is restricted while healing, 2) safety is an issue, 3) when the gait pattern is better with the device and worse without it.
- Wear supportive shoes (see Shoe Wear brochure )

## **CRACKING / POPPING JOINTS**

Many people frequently crack their knuckles, neck, or back. For some it is simply out of habit. For others it is an effort to seek relief from symptoms, even if only temporary. Sometimes it occurs with normal activities, like knees popping with squatting. Consider this: every time a joint cracks it is undergoing a trauma, even if it is small. Over time, these small, repeated traumas accumulate and can contribute to degeneration and arthritis. The best approach is to identify and resolve the movement impairment leading to the popping, or the perceived need to self-manipulate for relief.



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## DID YOU KNOW?

Many painful and debilitating conditions are caused or sustained by daily/nightly activities. Problems stem not only from *what* we do but also *how* we do it. Most people are not even aware of their destructive postures and movements. Some activities are beyond our control to eliminate or change. But awareness of and attention to those that are modifiable can be the difference between persistent pain and freedom from it.

We hope you find these suggestions helpful. Please consider consulting your physical therapist for further assistance or for persistent problems.

### STANDING

- Evenly distribute your weight to both feet.
- Avoid locking the knees into hyperextension (backwards like a flamingo).
- Avoid holding the low back excessively arched (like a gymnast).
- Avoid holding the back excessively rounded or flexed (like a monkey).
- When standing for prolonged periods is unavoidable, try shifting the weight momentarily between the feet. Alternate this with mini-squats, or subtly rocking the pelvis forward and backward. If possible briefly squat fully, or lean forward with hands on thighs.
- Wear supportive shoes (see Shoe Wear brochure)

### POSTURE

The body expends the least amount of energy against gravity when neutral alignment is maintained. This means (from the side view) the ear, shoulder, hip, knee, and ankle form a straight line and stack upon each other. This also applies somewhat in reclining and sitting. However, the body is meant to *move!* The static maintenance of *any* position or posture – even “ideal” posture – can create problems. So neutral alignment is good when static posturing is necessary, but movement between different postures and positions is ideal.

### CHANGING POSITIONS

- Rolling over in bed – keep the legs together and move the trunk and legs as one unit, like a log.
- Rising up from reclining - Avoid rising straight up using the abdominal muscles (like a sit-up). Instead, roll to side as mentioned above, drop legs over the side of the bed, and push up with your arms to sitting. Reverse this process when lying down.
- Sitting to standing/Standing to sitting – the low back should stay relatively still (no arching or rounding) while movement occurs at the hips and knees.

### BREATHING

This is another conversation in itself. Simply put, you should breathe through your nose as much as possible. Eating and talking require your mouth being open, but otherwise it should remain closed. This allows air to be filtered and warmed by your body prior to entering the lungs. Breathing through your mouth also causes neck and chest muscles to be used incorrectly for breathing, instead of your diaphragm.

### SLEEPING & RECLINING

Many people have difficulty getting comfortable, or wake with much pain. The reasons vary, but trying these universal tips may help:

- Positioning - think neutral spine.
  - ◇ Side lying— place a pillow under the waist (especially for women). Pillows between the knees and ankles may also help support a neutral spine. Avoid rotation, such as the left knee flexed forward with the left shoulder back.
  - ◇ Supine (lying on back) – if uncomfortable place a pillow under the knees.
  - ◇ Prone (on abdomen) – avoid extremes of neck rotation (turning) or extension, such as from a large pillow. If the low back is uncomfortable, a pillow under the abdomen may help.
- Pillows – the head and neck need to be in neutral.
  - ◇ Feather conforms best to create a custom pillow.
  - ◇ Solid foam is the least compliant and pushes back to recoil, keeping the head and neck muscles turned on.
  - ◇ A pillow should not be too high.
- Reading or watching TV in bed can promote undesirable positioning and overload of soft tissues.
- Mattress – this is a very individual choice. Generally speaking it should not sag/give much or at all when on it or especially when off of it.