Why Proper Posture is Important for Spinal Health

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The Importance of Osteoporosis Posture

If you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, your physician probably discussed a lot of things with you. Medication management was probably covered extensively, as was calcium and vitamin D supplementation, diet changes and exercise to strengthen your bones. But did your physician discuss proper osteoporosis posture?

Proper osteoporosis posture not only looks better aesthetically and reduces pain, but it may reduce the risk of spinal fractures.

The Importance of Proper Body Alignment

Improper posture causes kyphosis — or what is commonly known as the dowager's hump. Osteoporosis kyphosis is caused by fractures in the spine, which then causes the forward slump of the upper back.

Maintaining proper alignment puts less stress on the spine; this means the body, from head to toe, stays in line — head, shoulders, spine, hips, knees and ankles.

When in a standing position, here is how to maintain proper alignment:

- Keep the head held high with the chin in — the shoulder blades should be pulled slightly inwards as well.
- Your back has a natural arch — maintain the arch by gently pulling the abdomen in.
- Point your feet straight ahead.
- If standing in one place for more than a few minutes, take the weight off of one foot and switch to the other every so often.

It is just as important to keep your spine in alignment when lying down and sitting as it is when you are standing.

When going to bed, roll up towels or use a pillow behind your head, back and under the knees to keep the spine straight. When sitting, utilize a lumbar pillow to support your lower back. In addition, make it a point to remember not to slouch while sitting at your desk!

Movements to Avoid

In general, deep curvatures of the spine should be avoided. This includes deep bends, such as picking up books and boxes, and slouching while sitting in a comfortable chair.

Twisting of the spine should also be avoided. Keep your nose, knees and toes facing the same direction!

Exercises to Improve Posture

There are exercises that can be done to improve posture. Below, we have listed five for you:

1. **Walking.** Women with a walking routine, who walk briskly with long strides, actually have a reduced risk of fractures. Follow the principles of good posture while walking and get moving!
2. **Core exercises.** Perform exercises on the floor that will strengthen the core; examples include leg lefts and planks. Avoid core exercises that are known to arch the back, such as crunches.
3. **Weight training, using a wall for support.** Perform your resistance training exercises against a wall. Using the wall will remind you to use good posture, keeping your body aligned, while getting the benefits of weight training. Examples include bicep curls and upright rows.
4. **Shoulder exercises.** Standing in a corner, put your forearms against the wall and make sure your elbows are even with your stomach. Keep your abdominal muscles tight. Contract your shoulder blades, hold, then relax. Repeat.
5. **Upper back exercise.** In a seated position, place your hands behind your head, with your elbows out. Using your shoulders, pull the elbows back slightly. Repeat.

Lifting and Carrying Guidelines

In order to protect your spine and prevent fractures, there are certain precautions you should take if you have an osteoporotic spine. These guidelines will also help to maintain proper posture:

- Don’t lift or carry items more than 10 pounds.
- If you find you must lift something more than 10 pounds, do not bend so your back is parallel to the ground.
- If you must pick a box off of the floor, do not bend at the waist. Instead, kneel on one knee, using a table or chair for support.
- When grocery shopping, have your groceries packed lightly.
- When carrying the bags, hold them close to your body so you do not lose your balance.
- Do not carry a heavy purse.