



**Restoring Your Temple™:
Posturing for Successful Self-Treatment of
Back and Neck Pain**

PART 2

In PART 1 of this article we talked about the first three steps toward recovering from back and neck pain. They were: 1) Dedicating your body (temple) to the Lord, asking for His help in the recovery process, 2) Finding out what the source of your pain is and what exactly needs fixing, and 3) A willingness to invest in the recovery and maintenance of your health. Here we will explore the next universal step...healthy posturing.

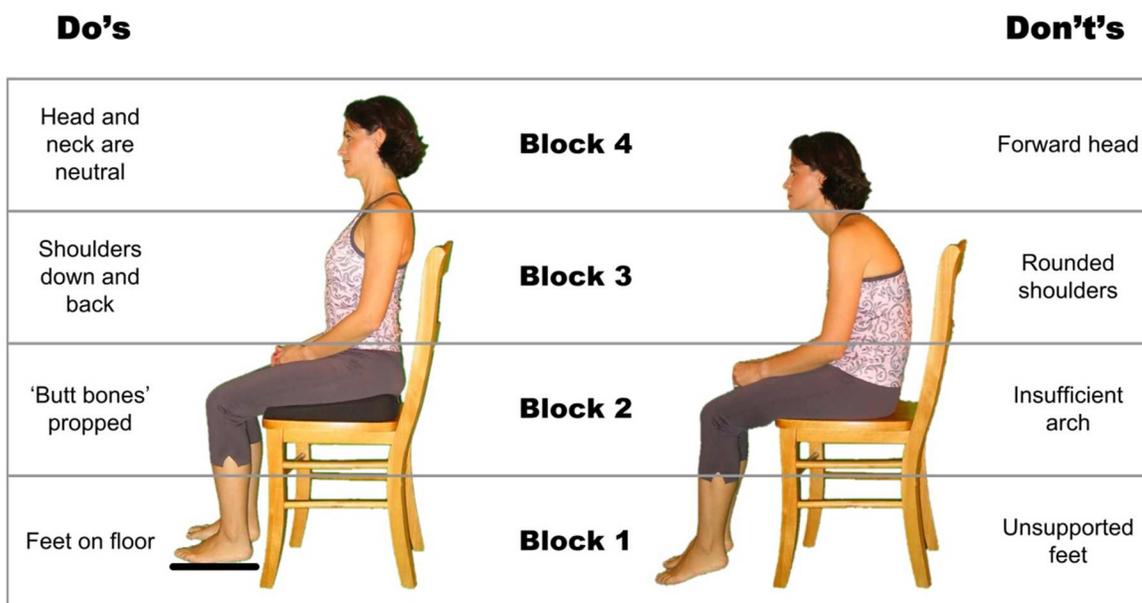
"He holds victory in store for the UPRIGHT..." ☺ Proverbs 2:7

Why, when you've tried just about everything, do you still suffer with back or neck pain? I believe the reason your pain remains is because its true culprit (pain source) has yet to be addressed. Throughout my twenty years in the field of physical therapy, I have discovered with repeated reliability, that my spine patients have common "weak links" in their health chains. In order to enable my patients to fully recover from their pain and *remain* pain free, I have developed an approach which continues to yield wonderful results time and again. *My comprehensive method*, which includes core stability and muscle strengthening, flexibility training, disc bulge reduction (if need be), movement re-education, and ergonomics, *always begins with posture re-education, regardless of the patient's pain source.*

Proper posture is the foundation for all recovery. Barring trauma, much of your body's aches and pains likely began with bad posture. A slouched posture will tighten up certain muscles while allowing other muscles to weaken. Faulty sitting, standing, and/or sleeping posture can also place harmful stress on your spine's ligaments, discs, and joints. These stressors can ultimately lead to: ligament laxity, early degenerative disc changes (bulging and herniations), and arthritis of your spine. What merely began as bad posture can wind up causing you to live in a broken down temple racked with pain. The best way to understand sitting and standing posture in the body is to view yourself as a tower composed of four blocks: your foot block (#1), your hip block (#2), your shoulder block (#3), and finally your head block (#4). Well-aligned blocks lead to a stable tower. Let me show you what I mean.

Sitting...Give Your Discs a Break!

The first area which typically requires an overhaul is sitting posture. This is especially true if you experience back or neck pain while seated. Most back and neck pain sufferers resemble the “Don’ts” photograph below. Linda was one such patient who complained of neck pain which built to an unbearable level each day as she sat in front of her computer at work. By using a wedge-shaped sitting cushion which tipped her “hip block” forward (#2) Linda was able to maintain a comfortable (healthy) arch in her lower back with minimal effort. This allowed her slumped “shoulder block”, (#3), to be more easily relocated over her hips. Finally, she was instructed to stack her “head block”, (#4), directly over her “shoulder block”, (#3). This new posture made Linda’s neck pain a thing of the past. Also of note here is the importance of foot contact with the floor when seated (Block #1). Overall, slumped sitting without foot support increases the pressure inside your low back discs by 45% over that of proper sitting! So be good to yourself. Sitting well equals feeling well.

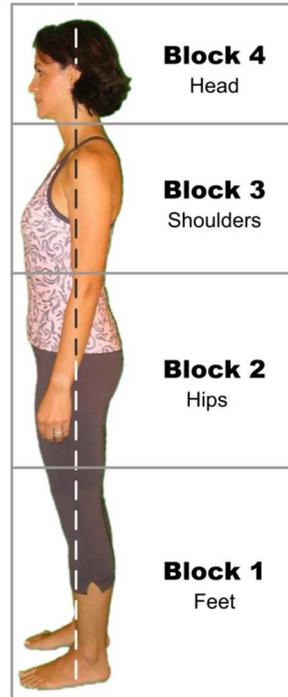


“Stand Up Straight!”

Listen closely. Can you hear your mother’s voice? Moms really do know what’s best for you! I wish my patient, Susan, had a mom who had “stayed on her back” about her posture. Susan was a fifty-something cashier who was experiencing significant low back pain (an 8 on a scale of 1-10). And no wonder—her posture looked painful! The first day I treated her I spent the session teaching her the proper way to stand during her eight hour shifts. When Susan returned for her next visit, she was amazed that her pain level had dropped from an “8” to a “4” out of 10—and I hadn’t even touched her!

As with the sitting posture, proper standing posture calls for a well-stacked tower of postural “blocks”. Good alignment requires that your hip “block” be positioned squarely over your ankle “block”, your shoulder “block” over your hip “block”, and finally, your head “block” over your shoulder “block” (see below).

Proper Alignment of Blocks 1 through 4



If you can identify your posture as one of those below: sideways shifted, flat back, or sway back, simply adjust your “blocks” so that you no longer resemble the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Your body will send you thank you notes instead of pain telegrams!

Sideways Shift



Flat Back



Sway Back



Sleeping Posture... Don't Add Insult to Injury

The final, but often the most important posture you need to address, is your sleeping posture. Let's take this one from the top, shall we? When trying to recover from neck pain, the position of your head in relation to your chest is very important. If you sleep on your back, your head should *not* be bent forward on two or more pillows. Too much neck flexion can cause the discs of your neck to bulge during the night. Also make sure to place your one pillow under your neck and head (not under your shoulders).

Do:



Don't:



For side-sleepers, it is critical that your nose is lined up with your breastbone. Any lower or higher and there will be harmful affects to your discs and joints of your neck.

Good Head Position



Head To Low



Head To High



Whether you have back or neck pain, it is important for side-sleepers to support their top leg on a pillow. Without this support, you will sleep with either your low back in a twisted position--which can be felt straight up through your neck (see **NOT SO GOOD**) or in a fetal position with your knees drawn up to your chest (see **EVEN WORSE**). These flexed and rotated positions place tremendous stress on the discs of your spine, giving them the perfect opportunity to bulge. By using a pillow between your knees, or better yet, a **body pillow** to support your top leg *and* top arm, you can maintain healthy spine alignment all night long.

Good



Not So Good



Even Worse



“But Lisa, I don’t sleep on my back or my side, I sleep on my stomach.” Then we really need to talk, sister. Stomach sleeping is *extremely* harmful to both your back and neck. So much so, I do everything I can to convince my patients to try the position pictured below as an alternative. Simply lie on your favorite side with a body pillow (or two pillows placed lengthwise) between your legs and under your top arm. Straightening your bottom leg, roll your body forward towards the mattress until you have “full frontal contact”. This will give you the sensation of lying face down without all the harmful stresses related to stomach sleeping. After some balking and some tossing and turning, my patients usually get the hang of this modified sleep position. And let me tell you, their morning wakeup call sounds more like birds singing than an old man groaning.

Pillow Position for Modified Stomach Sleeping



Good posture is undoubtedly the primary source of your physical strength and healing. And thankfully it is absolutely obtainable. It simply takes persistence. Set your eyes on the goal: To worship God with your *strength* (Mark 12:30) by regaining a structurally sound body. As a result, you can return to the full and blessed life God intended for you, ready for any good work He calls you to. Yes, I hear you...Amen to that!