

THE SIMPLE STEP TO BOOST ENERGY, AND LOOK AND FEEL BETTER

Are you often tired and achy, or frequently bothered by nagging neck or back pain? The culprit could be something obvious—and surprisingly easy to correct: your posture. About 60 percent of women slouch, a problem that can cause pain and even reduce your energy level. Poor posture can also make you appear to be older and heavier, while a well-aligned body projects an energetic, self-confident image.

The latest research suggests effective ways to improve your posture. Fixing the problem involves a combination of exercises and simple lifestyle strategies.

In a woman with good posture, the weight of the body is balanced perfectly on all the vertebrae in the spinal column. Sloppy posture shifts the pressure to fewer vertebrae or even to the facet joints, which are attached to the vertebrae and allow the spine to move. But these bones are unable to support this added weight, so the surrounding muscles try to compensate. “It’s a job they’re not made to do, so they cry out in pain,” explains Ted Dreisinger, director of research at the Columbia Spine Center in Columbia, Missouri. The result can be anything from stiffness to a sharp debilitating pain, says Willibald Nagger, M.D., Chairman of rehabilitative medicine at Cornell Medical Center in New York City.

Aside from the discomfort it causes, poor posture can chip away at your energy. Aches and pain can lead to muscle fatigue. “The extra stress poor posture puts on your muscles can leave you physically drained, which can make you feel tired,” says Kenneth’ Light, M.D., Director of the San Francisco Spine Center at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco.

Poor posture may even affect your breathing. Some experts have observed that slumping forward may leave less room for your lungs to fill with oxygen. When your lungs don’t expand and contract properly, you may not get enough oxygen to all the tissues throughout your body, says Mark A. Doyne, M.D., medical director of Conservative Care and Rehabilitation at the Texas Back Institute in Dallas. “That can sap your energy,” he says.