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Improve Your Posture... For Better Health

Is bad posture harming your health? According to recent research published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, poor posture is linked to...

- ✓ Reduced breathing capacity.
- ✓ Less overall strength.
- ✓ Slower walking speed.
- ✓ Increased risk of falling.

These problems are dangerous primarily because they interfere with a person's ability to exercise, which, in turn, may increase risk for health conditions ranging from cardiovascular disease to dementia.

THE SECRET TO GOOD POSTURE

Distortions in posture—which typically include a forward-thrusting head, hunched shoulders and a pelvis that is rolled forward—evolve over many years.

It's a mistake to strive for "perfect" posture, standing ramrod straight with shoulders back. To improve posture, it's more effective to focus on *balance, alignment and motion*.

Simple test: Stand straight and lift your left knee so it's bent at a 90° angle with your thigh parallel to the floor. If this is too high, lift your leg as high as you can. Do this in a doorway so you can catch yourself if necessary. Slowly count, stopping as soon as you must put your foot down or wave your arms to help you stay balanced. Switch legs and repeat. If you can't balance

Bottom Line/Health interviewed Steven Weiniger, DC, a chiropractor and certified posture exercise professional (CPEP) in private practice in Roswell, Georgia. A member of the postgraduate faculty of



New York Chiropractic College in Seneca Falls, New York, he leads CPEP training classes for health professionals. Dr. Weiniger was a delegate to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging and is the author of *Stand Taller—Live Longer: An Anti-Aging Strategy (BodyZone)*.

securely on each leg for at least 20 seconds, your muscles may be too weak to maintain balance.

IT TAKES JUST "THREE A DAY"

By practicing the three simple exercises below on a daily basis (each takes just a minute or two), you're likely to start to improve your posture, and your overall health, within a matter of weeks.

EXERCISE 1 One-leg balance. This exercise strengthens the balancing muscles on both sides of the body and improves your sense of your body's position.

Do this exercise at least three times daily—and near a wall in case you need help staying balanced. Wear any shoes and clothing you like. *What to do...*

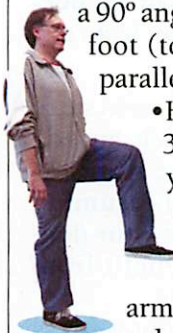
• Stand with your shoulders back and down and belly in.

• Next, lift your left knee as you did in the balance test so it's bent at a 90° angle with your thigh and foot (toes pointing forward) parallel to the floor.

• Hold this position for 30 seconds, keeping your right leg perfectly straight, knee locked but not pushed backward. Don't wave your arms, twist or hop around to keep your balance. If you

find that you must do any of these things, put your right hand on a nearby wall. Then switch legs and repeat to build symmetry of control and balance.

As your balance improves over time, touch the wall with just one finger... then tap the wall... then let go and balance unaided.



EXERCISE 2 Alignment. Performed at least once a day, this exercise helps improve your awareness of your body alignment and helps correct a forward-head posture.

What to do...

• Lie down on the floor, face-up with your arms at your sides, palms up and shoulders flat.

• Keeping your head level, look straight up at the ceiling. If you cannot comfortably keep your head level, place a thin pillow or rolled towels underneath.

• Relax, take a deep breath and maintain this position for at least two minutes while being conscious of the alignment of your head, shoulders and pelvis.

EXERCISE 3 Sitting posture. This exercise is especially useful if you sit for much of the day. Perform it at least three times daily.

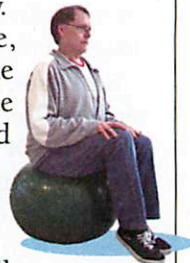
To do the exercise, you'll need an inflatable exercise ball (available at discount stores and sporting-goods stores for about \$20). The ball should be inflated so that when you sit on it, your knees are bent at a 90° angle and your thighs are parallel to the floor. *What to do...*

• Sit a third of the way back on the ball with your feet slightly apart, noting the position of your feet, pelvis, shoulders and chest.

• Next, slowly lift your right heel off the ground for 30 seconds, keeping your right toes on the floor. (If you start to wobble, touch a nearby wall with your left hand.)

• Return to the starting position and repeat with your left heel.

As this exercise becomes easier, try doing it with your feet pressed together. Once that becomes easy, progress to lifting each foot entirely off the ground for 30 seconds or as long as you can. *Caution:* If you feel unstable on the ball, have someone stand next to you or do the exercise near a wall or in a doorway. 🍎



LATE-BREAKING NEWS

Surprising risk factor for erectile dysfunction (ED). *Recent finding:* When researchers analyzed data on 23,119 men (average age 68), those who reported 15 or more monthly episodes of restless legs syndrome had a 78% higher risk for ED compared with those who had no episodes. *Theory:* Decreased function of the brain chemical *dopamine*, which regulates mood and movement, is thought to contribute to both conditions. *If you have either or both conditions:* Consult your doctor.

Xiang Gao, MD, research scientist, department of nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston.

Apple juice may curb Alzheimer's symptoms. *New study:* Twenty-one adults (ages 72 to 93) with moderate-to-severe Alzheimer's disease who consumed eight ounces of apple juice daily for one month showed a 27% improvement in behavioral and psychotic symptoms (including decreased anxiety, agitation and delusions). *Theory:* Apple juice may boost production of the neurotransmitter *acetylcholine*, which declines as a result of Alzheimer's. *If a loved one suffers from Alzheimer's:* In addition to giving prescribed medications, try serving apple juice to enhance his/her comfort.

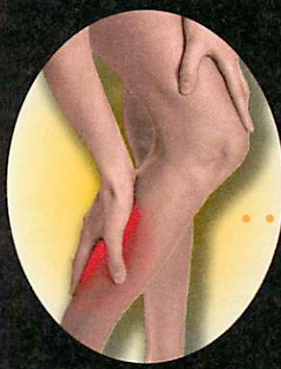
Thomas Shea, PhD, professor and director, Center for Cellular Neurobiology and Neurodegeneration Research, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Salt may weaken bones. *New research:* When 92 women with pre- or mild hypertension ate a low-sodium diet or a high-carbohydrate/low-fat diet for 14 weeks, those on the low-sodium diet excreted significantly less bone-building calcium through their urine than did the other dieters. *Theory:* Calcium binds with sodium and is excreted via urine. *To maintain healthy bones:* Men and women should limit sodium to the daily recommended intake of 2,300 mg. People with hypertension should consume no more than 1,500 mg daily.

Caryl Nowson, PhD, chair, Nutrition and Ageing, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia.

BottomLine health

WELLNESS STRATEGIES FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING MEDICAL EXPERTS



HIDDEN RED FLAG FOR HEART ATTACK AND STROKE

PERIPHERAL ARTERY DISEASE CAN EASILY BE CONFUSED WITH ORDINARY ACHES AND PAINS

MICHAEL S. CONTE, MD • UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO

How serious is peripheral artery disease (PAD)? We all know that plaque in arteries near the heart can lead to heart attack and plaque in the arteries of the neck and brain can lead to stroke.

With PAD, plaque is typically found in arteries that supply blood to the legs—an indication that blood flow also may be inhibited throughout the body, which increases risk for heart attack and stroke, as well as severe disability or loss of a limb.

Doctors have long been aware of PAD, but the disease has received relatively little attention because patients either don't have symptoms or have only mild or moderate ones that are wrongly attributed to normal signs of aging.

What's new: The link between PAD and cardiovascular disease is now so strong that virtually all doctors agree that a diagnosis of PAD warrants a checkup and monitoring by a vascular specialist.

What you need to know to protect yourself or a loved one....

ARE YOU AT RISK?

PAD is surprisingly common. It affects up to 10 million Americans. Because PAD is associated with the same risk factors as heart attack and stroke, the risk for PAD is higher among adults who are over age 50 and/or people who have elevated cholesterol or high blood pressure.

Having diabetes *doubles* the risk of developing PAD. Prediabetes also increases risk. But the greatest risk comes from smoking. At least 80% of people with PAD are current or former smokers. Statistically, the worst combination is smoking and having diabetes—when combined, they increase the risk of developing PAD fivefold.

SYMPTOMS CAN BE TRICKY

PAD is dangerous because it can creep up on you without causing

Bottom Line/Health interviewed Michael S. Conte, MD, a vascular surgeon and professor and chief of the division of vascular and endovascular surgery and codirector of the Heart and Vascular Center at the University of California, San Francisco. In 2006, he received the Distinguished Achievement Award from the New York Weill Cornell Medical Center Alumni Council. He is on the editorial boards of *Vascular and Endovascular Surgery* and *Vascular Medicine*.



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