GoalTodo

How to fix your posture: move often, stretch daily, get stronger

Improve your posture

8 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Jan 24

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Move every half hour, and three moves a day

Start moving

- [ ] Movement break: about every 30 minutes while you sit, stand up, walk a few steps or change position. Standing for a phone call counts
  a minute or two, about every 30 minutes
- [ ] Daily set: chin tucks, shoulder blade squeezes and a doorway chest stretch (each one is described in the guide)
  5 chin tucks, 4 squeezes held for a count of five, and 2 chest stretches of 20 to 30 seconds
- [ ] On a normal workday, note how long you usually sit without getting up, and any aches you notice and when

Done when: You did the daily set on 7 days, took movement breaks on most of your sitting days, and wrote down your notes from a normal workday

Sticking point: Forgetting. Tie the daily set to something that already happens every day, such as getting up from your desk for lunch, and the breaks to the end of each task or each call.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Fit your desk to you

Start moving

- [ ] Desk check: go through the desk and screen list in the guide, using books, a box or a cushion where you need to raise something
  about 20 minutes, once
- [ ] Movement break: stand up, walk a few steps or change position
  a minute or two, about every 30 minutes
- [ ] Daily set: chin tucks, shoulder blade squeezes, doorway chest stretch, and now the arm-across-chest stretch
  as in week 1, plus 3 arm-across-chest stretches of 20 seconds on each side

Done when: You checked your usual setup, made the adjustments you could, and did the daily set on 7 days

Sticking point: Laptops. With the screen raised to eye level, the keyboard ends up too high. A separate keyboard and mouse fix that, if you have them or your work can provide them. If not, raise the screen for long spells of reading and bring it down for long spells of typing.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Your first strength days

Get stronger

- [ ] [ ] Strength session: squats (or standing up from a chair and sitting back down), push-ups at a height that suits you (a wall, a kitchen counter or the floor), and lying shoulder blade squeezes (see the guide)
  1 set of 8 to 12 of each, slowly
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Daily set: as in week 2, plus wall angels
  as in week 2, plus 5 slow wall angels
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Movement break
  a minute or two, about every 30 minutes

Done when: You did 2 strength sessions and the daily set on 7 days, and passed day 21

Sticking point: Your muscles may feel a little sore for a day or two after your first strength session. That's fine. Sharp pain, or pain in a joint, is not: stop that move and see the warning signs in the guide.

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Change position, change tasks

Get stronger

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Swap positions for the same task: stand to read or take a call, sit right back in your chair to think, and sit forward to type. Try one position you don't usually use
  through the workday
- [ ] [ ] Strength session: squats, push-ups and lying shoulder blade squeezes
  2 sets of 8 to 12 of each, with a short rest between sets
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Daily set: as in week 3, plus pelvic tilts
  as in week 3, plus 10 slow pelvic tilts

Done when: You changed position for at least one task each workday, did 2 strength sessions with 2 sets, and did the daily set on 7 days

Sticking point: Losing track of time when you're absorbed in something. Before you start a long piece of work, set a timer for half an hour as a reminder to move.

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

Add a walk

Build up

- [ ] [ ] Strength session: squats, push-ups and lying shoulder blade squeezes. If 12 feels easy, make it harder: a lower surface for push-ups, or a slower squat
  2 sets of 8 to 12 of each
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Daily set: all six moves
  about 10 minutes
- [ ] [ ] [ ] A walk at lunch or after work, as one of your movement breaks
  10 minutes or more

Done when: You did 2 strength sessions, the daily set on 7 days, and 3 walks

Sticking point: Six moves can start to feel like a chore. On busy days, do the three from week 1. A short set every day matters more than a long one now and then.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Your phone and your sofa

Build up

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] When you read on your phone, bring it up towards eye level rather than dropping your head. For long calls, use the speaker or headphones instead of holding the phone with your shoulder
  whenever you pick up your phone
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] In the evening, get up and change position about every half hour, as you do at work
- [ ] [ ] Strength session
  2 sets of 8 to 12 of each
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Daily set: all six moves
  about 10 minutes

Done when: You did the daily set on 7 days and 2 strength sessions, moved in the evenings, and passed day 42

Sticking point: Long scrolling sessions are where the evening half hours go. The Less phone time plan has ideas if this week shows you a lot of them.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

Look back at week 1

Make it yours

- [ ] On a normal workday, note again how long you sit without getting up, and any aches. Compare with your notes from week 1
- [ ] [ ] Strength session
  2 or 3 sets of 8 to 12 of each
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Daily set: all six moves
  about 10 minutes
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Movement break
  about every 30 minutes

Done when: You compared this week's notes with week 1, did 2 strength sessions and did the daily set on 7 days

Sticking point: Expecting to look different. This plan is about how you move and how your days feel, not a straighter spine. If an ache hasn't changed, or is worse, see a GP or physiotherapist.

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Your routine from here

Make it yours

- [ ] Choose the moves you'll keep, your time of day for them, your strength days and how you'll remember your breaks. Write them down
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Daily set, your way
  5 to 10 minutes
- [ ] [ ] Strength session
  2 or 3 sets of 8 to 12 of each

Done when: You did the daily set on 7 days and 2 strength sessions, and wrote down how you'll keep going to day 90

Milestones

Mon, Nov 30	Do your first daily set
Sun, Dec 6	Seven days of moves in a row
Sun, Dec 20	Three weeks, with your first strength days
Sun, Jan 10	Six weeks of moving more
Sat, Feb 27	Ninety days

How to fix your posture: the honest answer

There's no single correct posture. Physiotherapists at NHS hospitals say there's no strong evidence that one best posture exists, or that avoiding "wrong" postures prevents back pain. Spines come in a range of natural shapes, and the spine is strong and adaptable: it's built to move and take load in lots of different positions. Cambridge University Hospitals' pain team says there's no clear evidence that bad posture causes back or joint pain in the first place.

What matters more is how long you stay put. The same team says that once you have pain, the time you spend in one position is what counts, not finding a perfect one. So the fix is mostly movement:

1. Change position often. healthdirect, Australia's government health service, suggests switching between sitting and standing about every 30 minutes. Sitting longer than that isn't dangerous, but moving and changing position can help, and being active is good for your health.

2. Do a short set of moves every day for your neck, shoulders and upper back, and to stretch your chest. They're described below, in our own words, from Harvard Health and a Cleveland Clinic physical therapist.

3. Set up your desk and screen so a comfortable position is the easy one, using the UK Health and Safety Executive's checklist.

4. Build strength on 2 days a week, as the NHS advises for all adults.

Good posture doesn't mean holding yourself stiff. healthdirect says good standing posture isn't rigid, and the hospital physiotherapists suggest exploring different, relaxed positions rather than one fixed one.

What this plan can't do. It won't straighten your spine, cure back or neck pain, or change how you look. The NHS says health professionals believe better flexibility can improve posture and reduce aches and pains. That, and more movement in your day, is the honest aim.

How the plan works

It's an 8-week habit, with something to do every day:

- A daily set of moves, about 5 minutes at first and 10 by week 5. You start with three moves and add one most weeks, up to six.
- A change of position about every 30 minutes on the days you sit or stand for long spells. Stand, walk a few steps, shift your weight, sit down: anything that's different from what you were doing.
- Your desk, or how you stand and lift, in week 2 and week 4, depending on your level.
- Strength on Monday and Thursday from week 3, about 15 minutes. Move the days if you like: any two days a week, with a day or more between them.

How the moves and habits fit together over 8 weeks is our own design, built from the sources below. The hold times for the shoulder blade squeeze and the stretches come from Harvard Health; the counts for chin tucks, wall angels and pelvic tilts are ours, because our sources don't give one. The strength sets follow the NHS.

The milestones count from the first day of week 1: day 21 is the end of your first strength week, day 42 the end of week 6, and day 90 comes about five weeks after the last week. After week 8 there are no new tasks: you keep your own routine going.

A tip from Harvard Health: tie the moves to something that already happens, such as getting up from your desk or a scheduled break, so they're easier to remember.

Which level to pick

- I sit at a desk most days: office work, working from home or studying. Week 2 is setting up your desk and screen, and your breaks are about getting up. If most of your sitting is behind the wheel, pick this level too: in week 2 set up your seat so you sit comfortably, and take your movement breaks when you're safely parked.
- I'm on my feet most of the day: shop, care, kitchen, warehouse or teaching work. Week 2 is relaxed standing and week 4 is lifting and carrying, and your breaks are about shifting position and sitting down.

Both levels have the same daily moves and the same strength days. If your week is a mix, pick the one you do most.

Before you start, and when to see a doctor

The moves in this plan are gentle, and they should never hurt. Stop any move that causes pain, and if your pain gets worse, see a GP, as the NHS advises for back pain.

Check the urgent signs below first. For other new pain, numbness, tingling or weakness, pain that wakes you at night, an injury, or a health condition that affects how you move, see a doctor or physiotherapist before you start. A physiotherapist can give you advice for your own body. In many parts of the UK you can refer yourself to NHS physiotherapy (community MSK services) without seeing a GP first.

The NHS says to see a GP if you have back pain and:

- it hasn't improved after a few weeks of looking after it at home
- it's stopping you doing your day-to-day activities
- it doesn't get better with rest, or is worse at night
- there's a lump or swelling in your back, or your back has changed shape (a new hump at the top of your back counts)
- it's worse when you sneeze, cough or poo
- it's coming from the top of your back, between your shoulders

Get urgent medical help if you have back pain and feel hot, cold, shivery or generally unwell, or if severe pain starts suddenly or gets worse quickly. In the UK, ask for an urgent GP appointment or contact NHS 111.

Call your local emergency number (999 in the UK, 911 in the US) or go to A&E if you have back pain and:

- pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs
- loss of feeling around your genitals or anus
- changes in your bladder or bowels, such as difficulty peeing, or peeing or pooing yourself
- changes in how your genitals feel during sex, or new trouble getting or keeping an erection or reaching orgasm
- chest pain
- it started after a serious accident

Get emergency help the same way if you have neck pain and suddenly develop weakness in your arms or legs, trouble walking or balancing, numbness in both arms or both legs, clumsy hands, or changes to your bladder or bowels.

These are rare, but they need help straight away. Don't drive yourself.

For other neck or arm symptoms, such as pins and needles or numbness in your arm or hand, stop the moves and see a GP.

The daily moves, in words

Move slowly and breathe normally. You should feel gentle work or a mild stretch, never pain.

1. Chin tuck. Sit tall and look straight ahead. Gently draw your chin straight back, without tipping your head up or down, as if you're making a double chin. A fingertip on your chin can guide it. Hold for about five seconds, then relax. 5 times.

2. Shoulder blade squeeze. Sit up in a chair with your hands on your thighs, shoulders down and chin level. Slowly draw your shoulders back and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for a count of five, then relax. 3 or 4 times.

3. Doorway chest stretch. Stand in a doorway with your arms out to the sides, elbows bent at a right angle and upper arms level with your shoulders. Rest your palms on either side of the frame. Step one foot forward and lean gently through the doorway until you feel a stretch across your chest. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds. A corner of a room works the same way. Twice.

4. Arm-across-chest stretch (from week 2). Raise one arm to shoulder height, bend it at the elbow and use your other hand to ease the elbow gently across your chest until you feel a stretch in the back of that shoulder. Hold for 20 seconds. 3 times on each side.

5. Wall angel (from week 3). Stand with your back against a wall, with your head, shoulder blades and bottom touching it if that's comfortable. Arms by your sides, palms facing out. Slowly slide your arms out and up the wall, keeping the backs of your hands on it, only as high as is comfortable, then slowly back down. 5 times. You can also do this lying on the floor.

6. Pelvic tilt (from week 4). Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat. Gently tilt your pelvis so your lower back moves towards the floor, then let it come back to its natural curve. Your back doesn't need to press flat. 10 slow times.

For strength days: the lying shoulder blade squeeze is lying on your back with your knees bent and arms by your sides, palms up, and gently pressing your shoulder blades down and back into the floor for a few seconds.

Set up your desk and screen

The UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) gives this checklist for anyone using a screen at work or at home:

- Screen directly in front of you, about an arm's length away, with the top of it level with your eyes.
- Keyboard just below elbow height, central in front of you, so you don't twist. Mouse in line with your elbow.
- Shoulders relaxed. Sit high enough that you don't need to shrug.
- Seat height that supports the backs of your thighs evenly, with a gap of 2 to 3 cm between the front of the seat and the back of your knees. A cushion can raise you.
- Lower back supported by the back of the chair, or a cushion behind it.
- Feet flat on the floor, or on a box or a stack of books if they don't reach.
- Laptop for long spells: the HSE suggests a separate keyboard and mouse, so the screen can be raised on a stand or similar. A stack of books works.

You don't need to buy a new chair or a standing desk. Sit right back in your chair and let it hold you up: physiotherapists say sitting bolt upright and tense, with no back support, gets uncomfortable. And no setup replaces getting up every half hour or so.

Strength, twice a week

The NHS asks adults to do muscle-strengthening activity that works all the major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, stomach, chest, shoulders and arms) on at least 2 days a week. This plan's sessions are short:

- Squats, or standing up from a firm chair and sitting back down slowly, without using your hands.
- Push-ups at a height that lets you do 8 good ones: against a wall, a kitchen counter, on your knees or on the floor.
- Lying shoulder blade squeezes (described above).

The NHS suggests 8 to 12 repetitions of each, which counts as one set, and at least 2 sets. You start with one set in week 3 and do two from week 4. Work until the last few are hard, rest, then do the next set. If 12 gets easy, make the move harder.

For a fuller routine, the Get strong plan works every major muscle group, and Build up to 100 push-ups has a step-by-step push-up ladder. If you have a resistance band at home, a standing row (pulling the band back with your elbows close to your sides, squeezing your shoulder blades) is a good one to add.

What to skip, and common mistakes

- Braces, harnesses and posture correctors. A Cleveland Clinic physical therapist discourages passive devices like harnesses: as soon as you take them off, the benefit goes. This plan uses none, and no gadgets or apps. A timer or the clock is all you need for your breaks.
- Sitting bolt upright all day. Relax back into your chair and change position often instead.
- Holding your stomach tight all the time. Physiotherapists find that people with long-term back pain often keep their core muscles tense, and that this can add to tension and pain. Breathe normally.
- Blaming every ache on posture. Back and neck pain have many causes, and the evidence that posture causes them is weak. If an ache lasts, see a GP or physiotherapist.
- Pushing through pain. These moves should feel easy. Pain means stop.

▪ Waiting to remember. Tie the daily set to something that happens every day, and set a timer for long, absorbing work.

▪ Expecting a quick change in the mirror. This plan changes how you move and how your days feel. It doesn't promise a different shape.

Keeping it up to day 90

After week 8 there are no new tasks. Keep three things going:

▪ Your daily set, at your time, even if it's only the three moves from week 1 on busy days.

▪ A change of position about every half hour when you sit or stand for long spells.

▪ Two strength days a week.

Once a month, look back at your notes. Is the time of day still working? Do your breaks still happen? Change one thing if not. The Walk every day plan is a good way to add more movement, and Do the splits is a longer stretching goal if you want one.

If you miss a day, do your set the next day. Your days in a row start again, but the habit doesn't vanish.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Missed a week, or most of one? Pick up where you stopped. Do your daily set the next day, and don't double up sessions to catch up.

Missed 2 weeks: Repeat the last week you finished in full, then carry on. If you sit at a desk, check your setup is still the way you left it.

Missed 3 weeks: Go back to week 3 (your first strength week) and build up again. If strength days were what slipped, keep the daily set going and add one strength day, then the second.

Missed 4 or more weeks: Start again at week 1 of your level. If you stopped because of pain, numbness or tingling, see a doctor or physiotherapist before you start again.

Sources

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
`https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/myth-busting-about-posture-core-stability-and-lifting/`
“When clinicians look at the research though, there is no clear evidence to prove that bad posture CAUSES back or other joint pain.”

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
`https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/myth-busting-about-posture-core-stability-and-lifting/`
“Overall, the evidence shows that there is no ‘perfect’ posture for sitting or standing; it is the time spent in a posture that is key.”

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
`https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/myth-busting-about-posture-core-stability-and-lifting/`
“Instead try and move regularly, and explore different, relaxed postures.”

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
`https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/resources/posture/`
“Despite common posture beliefs, there is no strong evidence that one optimal posture exists or that avoiding ‘incorrect’ postures will prevent low back pain.”

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/resources/posture/
“The spine is a robust, adaptable structure, capable of safely moving and loading in a variety of postures.”

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/resources/posture/
“However, moving and changing positions can be helpful, and being physically active is important for your health.”

healthdirect Australia
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/how-to-improve-your-posture
“Try to alternate between sitting and standing every 30 minutes.”

healthdirect Australia
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/how-to-improve-your-posture
“Good standing posture does not mean you need to stand stiffly or rigidly.”

healthdirect Australia
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/how-to-improve-your-posture
“A physiotherapist can give you personalised advice to help improve your posture.”

Harvard Health Publishing
https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/4-ways-to-turn-good-posture-into-less-back-pain
“Slowly draw your shoulders back and squeeze your shoulder blades together.”

Harvard Health Publishing
https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/4-ways-to-turn-good-posture-into-less-back-pain
“Hold this position for 20-30 seconds.”

Harvard Health Publishing
https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/4-ways-to-turn-good-posture-into-less-back-pain
“You might try to find a good trigger to help you remember, such as doing one or more of them when you get up from your desk, or right before scheduled breaks and lunch.”

Cleveland Clinic
https://health.clevelandclinic.org/posture-exercises
“While sitting, carefully pull your chin backward, without changing your eye level.”

Cleveland Clinic
https://health.clevelandclinic.org/posture-exercises
“Place your palms on either side of the doorway.”

Cleveland Clinic
https://health.clevelandclinic.org/posture-exercises
““I discourage people from using passive devices, like harnesses,” she says.”

Health and Safety Executive
https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/good-posture.htm
“This page will help employers and workers to understand what good posture looks like when using display screen equipment at home or in the workplace.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/
“It's a good idea to do muscle-strengthening activities that work all the major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms) on at least 2 days a week.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/
“Try to do 8 to 12 repetitions for each activity, which counts as 1 set.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/how-to-improve-strength-flexibility/
“Health professionals believe that improving your flexibility can improve your posture, reduce aches and pains, and lower your risk of injury.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/
“Very rarely, back pain can be a sign of a serious problem such as a broken bone, cancer or an infection.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/
“But stop if your pain gets worse and see a GP for advice.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/
“In many areas you may be able to get help, such as physiotherapy, from NHS community musculoskeletal (MSK) services without needing a referral from a GP.”

NHS
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/
“changes in how your penis or vagina feels during sex, not being able to get or keep an erection, or not being able to orgasm”

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust
https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/spinal/neck/
“Neck pain is rarely serious, however you should go to Accident & Emergency straight away if you suddenly develop:”

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust
https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/spinal/neck/
“problems with your walking or balance e.g. tripping over, struggling to pick your feet up, or your legs feeling heavy”

This plan online	https://goaltodo.com/fix-your-posture
Reach it with others on Welang	https://welang.com/goals
Reach it on your own in HourLife	https://www.hourlife.com

This plan is a guide, not medical advice. See a doctor before starting if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time.