



Posture challenges

Hello again and welcome!

Welcome to my new subscribers...and hello again to my existing supporters. Thank you for signing up to receive my blog; I hope you find this week's content interesting and feel it was worth subscribing to.

Diana xx



'Sit up straight!'; 'Don't slouch!' 'Sit properly: you weren't raised in a barn!' etc. All comments we often hear (or perhaps were told!) when we were growing up; or have perhaps used on our own children. The 'social' importance of 'good' posture was likely drummed into us from a young age. 'Posture' is more than just sitting up straight though (although that's part of it); many people struggle to maintain good posture and feel the difficulties of this, but for us with MS posture can prove a real challenge, but may not be something we had thought too much about.

The mechanisms for 'good posture' are closely linked to those within last week's blog on core strength [available [here](#) if you missed it], but they are distinct enough to warrant their own attention (and to avoid the issues with file-size I had with the rather huge ['healthy weight'](#) blog a while ago!)

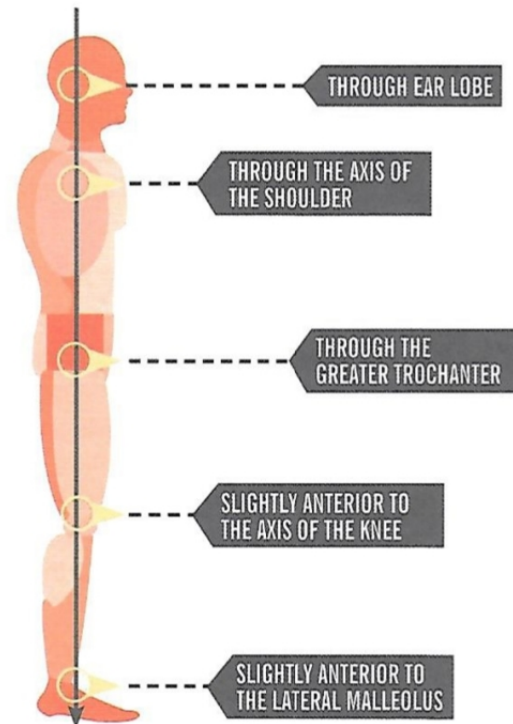
What do we mean by posture?

Posture is considered 'the position the body adopts in response to gravity. It is the way you hold yourself when sitting, standing or lying down'. So effectively, how we hold and carry ourselves in going about daily life. Posture doesn't refer only to static movements like those mentioned above but also relates to moving *into* a sitting, standing or lying position, and the controlled movements of individual limbs when performing a movement eg reaching for something from

these positions. The traditional consideration of 'good' posture goes along the lines of 'standing straight, shoulders back, tummy tucked in and tail tucked under' which is essentially correct, but there is an argument that posture is only considered 'poor' if it is causing pain or soreness which prevents you from doing everyday tasks.

Neutral spine

In exercise there is the notion of a 'neutral spine' where the spine's four natural S-shaped curves are present and aligned; when the spine is in this position stress on the spinal ligaments and vertebrae is minimal reducing the risk of strain and damage to the lower back. Apologies for the anatomy lesson, this image just shows the position well.



Why is it important?

Good posture is important to help you feel balanced, able to carry out everyday tasks easily and help to prevent stress on muscles and the structural framework of tendons and ligaments causing damage appearing as aches, stiffness and pain.

Good posture is particularly important if you can't easily move from one position to another by yourself; if you spend large parts of the day in a wheelchair or you experience fatigue and muscle weakness. Good posture uses less energy to maintain a sitting, standing or lying position.

Arguably, our teachers/parents weren't incorrect when suggesting we hold ourselves better.

How can MS symptoms affect our posture?

Many of our MS symptoms can make good posture difficult; these may come on gradually such that you don't immediately notice their impact on posture:

1. Weakness: as we discussed above, muscle weakness can make it harder to keep yourself in alignment.

2. Fatigue: It's naturally more difficult to maintain an upright aligned posture when you're experiencing fatigue. Fatigue may be one of your MS symptoms, or tiredness from unrelated factors such as not getting enough sleep, stress, low mood, lack of exercise, poor diet and some medications.

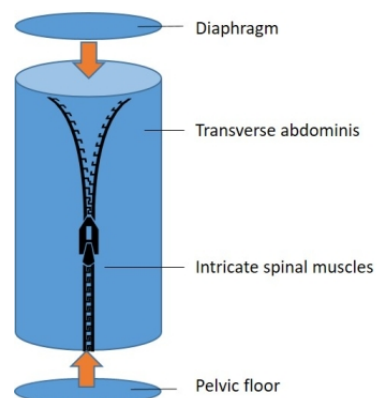
3. Vision: Poor eyesight can mean you drop your head when reading a book, working on a computer or watching television; this can cause neck and upper back pain.

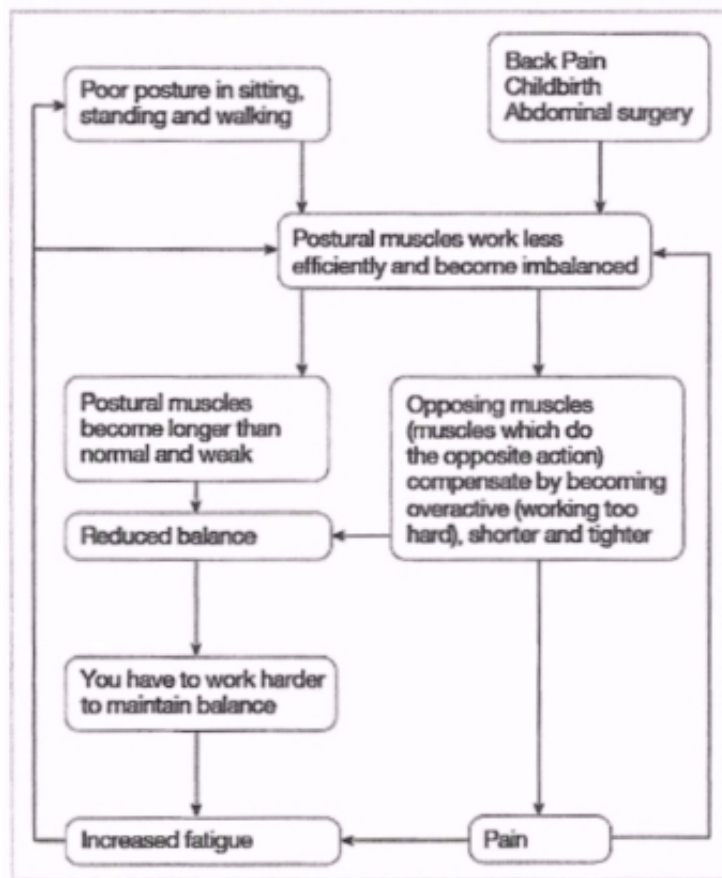
4. Numbness or tingling: If you experience tingling in your feet it can affect your balance and cause you to feel unstable and compensate with the other leg.

5. Foot-drop: Similarly if you experience foot drop it can cause you to walk in an unbalanced way and put pressure on the leg in trying to remain upright.

What can we do to maintain good posture?

This is where there are close links to last week's blog on core strength and balance; the core (which is the trunk of the body comprising the muscles surrounding the spine, diaphragm, pelvic floor, transversus abdominis and intricate muscles of the spine) plays a large role in posture and keeping us upright and aligned. Poor posture can result in imbalance and weakness in the core (postural) muscles and affect the ability to stabilise the spine, and vice versa. The MS Trust have created a nice diagram explaining this vicious cycle;





Some practical tips to help...

I *would* say this as a PT, but exercise can really help with posture challenges.

- If you can strengthen your core muscles, neck and upper back/shoulder muscles it can help to carry your head (which is pretty heavy!) and help with maintaining a neutral spine or alignment.
- Pilates, yoga and Tai Chi can help
- Pace yourself when walking; take short breaks to make sure you can keep good posture when you're moving
- Make sure you have supportive furniture when sitting or lying down
- If you struggle with vision, move your seat closer to the computer to prevent leaning over the desk and pushing your chin too far forward; use a larger font size; move your television around if you find you are leaning forward to see what's going on
- If you struggle with numbness when walking it is easy to look down at the floor which can put strain on you neck; practice looking a few steps forwards if you can, which may help you to remain more upright.



As usual, cautionary note...



If you find symptoms impact your posture and cause you pain, please consult a physiotherapist or personal trainer for an assessment; they can provide a personalised recommendation of exercises which can help you with your specific symptoms.

As always, the last word from me...

Do let me know if you have found this post helpful. Send me an [email](#); join me on Twitter (@healthylifems) or send me a message through the contact page on the website, I'd love to know what you think.



Diana xx

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Thank you for reading :)

Diana xx

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hello@healthylifems.com

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