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An adviser to Olympic athletes shares some important tips for a better-looking you

How to Improve Your Posture

CAN good posture make you more beautiful?

Some of the world's most beautiful women agree that beauty means looking healthy and youthful, and that depends on a good diet, a positive psychological attitude, rest and—possibly most important—good posture.

No one finds appealing or beautiful a woman who has round shoulders, a caved-in chest, protruding abdomen and buttocks, and feet rotated inward or outward—even if she has beautiful hair, great facial tone and perfect skin.

Well, the truth is that everyone has imperfections, but many of them can be corrected or improved.

Chronological age, how far apart your eyes are or the size of your breasts matters very little. What's important is what you do with what you've got.

At any age, the main obstacle is gravity. Gravity is always with us, pulling down anything we don't hold up. To combat it, one must strengthen the "postural muscles." These are the muscle groups that, when fatigued, weakened or educated improperly, allow our bodies to sag and slump. And the more you slump, the more you lose flexibility. So, you not only look older, you move older and feel older.

To help yourself maintain good posture, start by examining yourself in a full-length mirror, barefoot and unclothed. Where are your head and neck? Are your shoulders rounded? Are you balanced?

By Dr. Leroy Perry

Good posture means good balance. Your weight should be evenly distributed from your heels to the balls of your feet and toes. Your center of gravity should be slightly in front of and between your ankles. An imaginary vertical plumb line would run upward from that point through the midpoint between your knees, your pubic bone, your navel, the midpoint of your sternum, the mid-tip of your chin, between your eyes and straight up through your forehead.

The arches of your feet should be relaxed and slightly raised on the inside. Your ankles should be at the same level horizontally, and so should knees, hips, shoulders, eyes and ears. Your arms should hang relaxed; hands and fingertips should be level.

Now observe yourself from the side.

From the floor, the plumb line should be slightly in front of your ankle protruberance, cross the forward third of your knees, pass through your hip, the forward third of your elbow, slightly forward of your shoulder, through your mid-ear and up through your head.

The head, from both the front and side view, should be positioned evenly between the shoulders.

If what you see isn't exactly ideal, here are some exercises—mental and physical—designed to help you help your posture. Remember: Good posture is beauty. It is never too late.

It is helpful to use a technique called "imagery," common in ballet, yoga and sports medicine. The premise is simple. You must learn to concentrate on an image of perfect posture, whether standing or moving. First, you must have a clear image in your mind of what it is you wish to mimic.

For example, imagine that balloons are attached to the parts of your body you wish to lift or control. Pretend that these balloons are full of helium. Associate them with specific colors you like. Eventually, every time you see that color, you will create an imaginary lift. This technique has helped many athletes and models. We'll come back to imagery more specifically in the individual exercises that follow.

HEEL-TO-TOE CALF STRETCHES

Stand in place, your weight on your left heel and your right toes. Alternate your weight to the left toes and the right heel. Repeat this exercise in a rocking action, back and forth, making sure your hips are always even. Your hands and arms should swing unrestricted with the opposite leg movement, as is normally done in walking. Do at least 30 repetitions.

This exercise is designed to help you tone your calves and give your legs better definition from your feet and ankles all the way up to your hips and thighs. (High-heeled shoes, incidentally, may make your calves look firm, but they can ruin your feet and



cause a multitude of postural problems.)

Imagery: Imagine that the top of your head has a helium balloon attached. Every heel-to-toe stretch allows the balloon to create a greater lift, elongating your entire body. The taller and more erect you become, the younger you will look and feel. This exercise will put a bounce back into your step.

TUMMY TUCKS

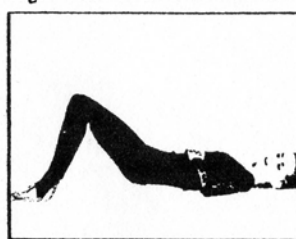
These exercises are designed to get rid of that pot belly by toning your abdomen. They decrease the curvature of your lower back and therefore can often help reduce a swayed lower back



or protruding buttocks. This exercise is a must if you are to maintain good posture.

(A) While standing, lean against the wall at a 45-degree angle. Make sure your feet are flat. Curl and tuck your pubic bone into your navel, allowing the deep abdominal muscles to contract. Do not tighten your buttocks or your back. Repeat this exercise in a rolling fashion from low on your abdomen to your diaphragm.

(B) While lying on a thick carpet or rug, bend both knees at a 45-degree angle. Place both feet on the floor.



Concentrate on curling your abdominal muscles by tucking your pubic bone up toward your navel. Use only your abdominal muscles, not your back.

Imagery: Imagine a helium balloon

attached to your pubic bone. Color the balloon your favorite color, and every time you see that color, let your pubic bone tilt upward, taking pressure off your lower back. Remember: Good posture needs a strong foundation. If your lower buttocks protrude and your abdomen drops, so will your chest, shoulders and head.

BUN BURNERS

This exercise, designed to "burn off" unwanted flab around your thighs and buttocks, can be done almost anywhere. It is a modified form of walking. You lean forward, keeping your chest in front of your pubic bone, and push off with your back foot and toes, propelling yourself. Your arms should swing in a free pendulum manner, straight forward and back, not in a rotary manner. Allow your pubic bone to rise slightly by tucking it into your navel. To get full benefit, bend your knees about 5 to 10 degrees. You might look a little like Groucho Marx as you push off that back foot, but who cares? You'll be toning your calves, hamstrings, buttocks and thighs.

Athletic shoes can be helpful for this exercise, but almost any shoe (except, of course, high heels) will do.

Imagery: Pretend your pubic bone, chest and head each has a balloon attached to it. The more you walk, the greater the amount of helium in the balloons and the higher they lift.

BALLOON BOBBERS

These exercises are designed to correct rounded shoulders, to raise the chest and breast and to help bring the neck and head into alignment with the spine and upper body. They also will increase lung capacity, which is important for your overall skin tone. The more oxygen tissues receive, the better.

They also help to strengthen your upper back, creating a more erect posture. This allows your chest and breasts to maintain a better symmetrical balance to your upper body.

(A) Standing in front of a mirror, let your arms and hands hang free next to your body. Rotate your shoulders backward and try to make your shoulder blades touch. Concentrate on the lifting action of the shoulders and on the downward movement as the shoulder blades come together. Lift the chest upward.



(B) Standing in front of a mirror, place your hands on top of your shoulders with your elbows extended laterally away from your body. Rotate your shoulders and elbows backward as if to approximate the shoulder blades. As your shoulder blades come together behind you, lift your chest upward.



REVERSE TURKEY PECKERS

A turkey pecks for seed with a forward gliding action of the head and neck. This exercise reverses the process. With both hands, apply resistance to the back of your head while creating a backward gliding action of your head and neck.

This exercise helps maintain your neck tone and strengthen the back of your neck, causing your head and neck to align with your spine. This will reduce tension on your upper spine, neck and head, allowing your facial muscles to relax. Often, the forward protrusion of the neck and head causes the face to sag, resulting in jowls and wrinkles. The more your head protrudes forward, the more your spinal cord is stretched, which can aggravate stress-related problems, such as lower-back pain, headaches and tension. If you don't feel good, it is hard to feel beautiful.