

The Alexander Technique

AS A BABY, YOU PROBABLY HAD PERFECT posture. As an adult, though, the chances are you've developed a long list of bad habits that not only lead to permanently poor posture but to a number of posture-related problems, such as backache, migraine, muscle strain and even mental fatigue and stress.

"Incorrect posture means that your body is out of balance," says osteopath Anne Cooper from the Newtown Osteopathic Centre in Sydney. "This imbalance means your muscles and body constantly have to work harder than necessary, leading to energy loss and illness."

So what is poor posture? There are two extremes, termed as 'slouched posture' and 'stiff posture'. If you're an office-based desk worker, it's likely you have a slouched posture: rounded shoulders, a caved-in chest and a protruding stomach. The consequences? Shallow breathing, knotted muscles in your upper back and nasty, tension-induced headaches. At the other end of the bad posture scale, you have stiff posture if your spinal curve is exaggerated and your chest sticks out. This can lead to pain and unbearable tension in your lower back and neck and – in the long term – a crushed spine.

Cooper's definition of good posture? "When you stand with your feet together and your weight is evenly balanced, your pelvis, neck, spine and head are straight yet not rigid," she says. As well as yoga, there are a number of ways to achieve perfect posture and, in turn, improve your overall sense of wellbeing. You can try the following three methods, both at your local alternative health centre and at home. ▶

In Theory: The Alexander Technique helps enhance balance and coordination and to break bad tension-forming habits by freeing the head, neck and back.

In Practice: The "teacher" guides you through everyday movements, such as sitting down and standing up, positioning your neck, head and spinal column to get you to move with total ease. Lessons usually last 30 minutes, but continuous long-term improvement generally takes 25-30 lessons, costing \$30-\$35 each.

At Home: The key to performing the following two movements correctly is training your mind to be aware of what your body is doing.

1

POSTURE-PERFECTING WALL KNEE BEND

- Stand with your back to a wall, but not leaning against it, keeping your feet slightly apart and your weight evenly balanced.
- Slowly bend your knees and slide down the wall a little, making sure your neck doesn't stiffen, your head is centrally balanced and your shoulders are relaxed.
- Slowly slide up the wall, making sure the centre of your back stays flat against it.
- Repeat four times.



2

POSTURE-PERFECTING WALL TOE RAISE

- Stand with your back to a wall, as before.
- Using your head, not your chest, to lead you up the wall, raise up onto your tip toes and hold the balanced position for the count of 20.
- Repeat four times.



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