

This school year, put posture to the test

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We often hear about how technology has impacted younger generations, and with the increased time spent on phones and computers, playing video games and watching television, it is their posture that is increasingly suffering. According to a physical therapist at Baylor College of Medicine, maintaining your posture should begin at an early age.

"Children will start having posture problems if they do not work on it sooner rather than later," said Melanie McNeal, a certified physical therapist and orthopedic clinical specialist with Baylor. "It is always better to work on it when you are younger than when you are older. Then it is easier to maintain at an older age."

Many day-to-day activities make it difficult to maintain good posture. These include constantly looking down at cell phones or tablets to read, working at the computer for extended hours and hunching forward while driving or eating.

"The further forward your [head](#) is sitting on your spine, the more weight the spine has to bear, and as a consequence, it's going to overload the muscles and joints and lead to a lot of issues," McNeal said.

One of the biggest consequences of having bad posture is chronic neck or low back pain, which can lead to loss of function. This can make it difficult to turn your head while driving, sleep, sit at the computer for an extended period of time and even read.

McNeal said there are two tests that indicate poor posture:

1. See if you can stand with your back against a wall and touch your heels, buttocks, shoulder blades and head to the wall. The key is to touch the back of your head to the wall looking straight ahead rather than having to look up to get your head against the wall.
2. Lie on your back on a flat surface without using a pillow and see if you can get your head flat against the surface without having to tilt your head back.

There are exercises that can be done to improve posture, McNeal said. These focus on stretching out the muscles in the upper part of the neck, stretching out the pecs and strengthening the muscles between your shoulder blades as well as the deep neck flexor muscles. However, a good rule of thumb is that when driving, put your head back against the headrest and to sit all the way back in the chair when eating or working on a [computer](#).

Common signs that your [posture](#) is impacting you include [neck](#) pain and stiffness, pain between the shoulder blades, difficulty lifting your arms overhead and difficulty look back or up at the ceiling.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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