<u>Posture for a Healthy Back</u>

Posture is a critical part of your health and can frequently be overlooked. Good posture isn't just important for sitting at your desk, but vital for standing, walking and sleeping as well.   There are many muscles that are important for good posture. The two main areas include scapular and core muscles. The scapular muscles (shoulder blades) need to be strong to assist in holding the shoulders back, which helps keep your head in a neutral position. The core muscles (abdominals) work with the lumbar (low back) muscles to assist in maintaining an upright posture. Those muscle groups do not become strong without assistance. It takes exercise and training for proper posture. Poor posture as a result of bad habits carried out over time can lead to neck pain, headaches, low back pain, and other difficulties.

The following are tips to follow for improved postural alignment:
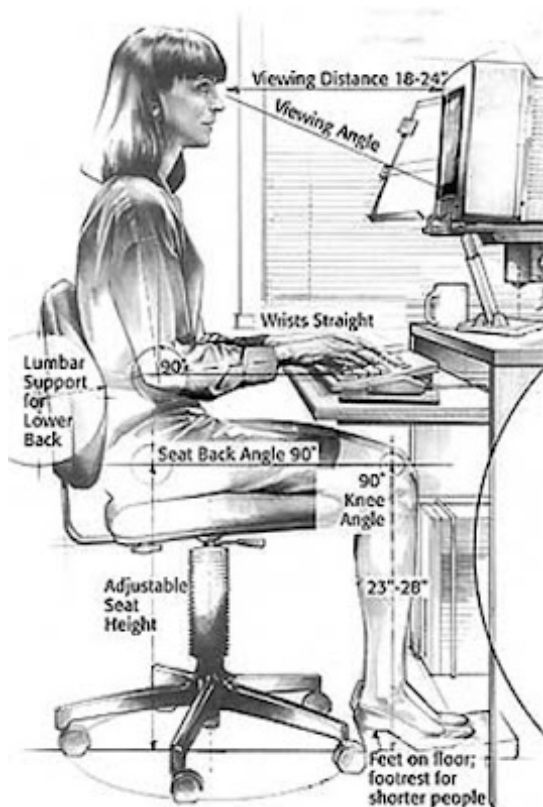
Sitting:
1. Sit up straight with your buttocks at the back of the chair
2. A small towel roll or lumbar roll can help maintain your lumbar spine curve
3. Keep your feet on the ground and try to avoid crossing your legs for long periods of time (if your feet don't hit the ground try using a book or stool under your feet)
4. Sit with your knees at or slightly below hip level
5. Keep the computer screen at eye level
6. Make sure to take a break and stand up at least every 20 minutes

Standing:
1. Stand up straight
2. Keep the shoulders, hips and knees relaxed and maintain them in a straight line
3. Keep your knees slightly bent
4. Engage your abdominals slightly
5. If standing for a prolonged period of time, rest one foot on a stool or shift your weight
6. Get in the habit of using your eyes to look down rather than bending the head down

Walking:
1. Stand up straight
2. Keep the head up and look ahead rather than down
3. Keep the feet pointed forward
4. Avoid taking short steps and follow a heel-toe walking pattern (you should never hear your feet scuffing the ground)

Sleeping:
1. Choose a firm mattress that supports your back
2. Avoid sleeping on your stomach, as it can cause back strain and can be uncomfortable for your neck
3. Sleep with one pillow
4. If you are a side sleeper, try a pillow between your knees to keep your back in a neutral position
5. Roll to your side when getting out of bed to avoid strain on your low back and neck

Good posture involves training your body to sit, stand, walk, and lie in positions where the least strain is placed on supporting muscles and ligaments. It can prevent fatigue because your muscles are used more efficiently. Good posture also contributes to an overall good appearance.