



POSTURAL AWARENESS

Posture • noun 1 a particular position of the body. 2 the way in which a person holds their body. 3 an approach or attitude towards something.

Do you experience a dull ache in your lower back, or pain in your neck and shoulders after sitting for a prolonged period of time? Have you ever been woken up in the night by pins and needles?

Back injuries can affect all people, in all job roles and all industry sectors. Poor posture at work is a major cause of back pain, workplace stress, repetitive strain injury, resulting in lost time, reduced productivity, poor employee health, low morale, and higher costs.

What causes bad posture? Why do we have poor posture? There are two sides to this, physical and mental. Physically, the short answer, going right back to fundamentals, is that we are hunter-gatherers. We no longer do what we evolved to do. We are emphatically not designed to spend our day sitting on our bottoms staring fixedly at a computer screen or in a car seat staring at the road ahead, or for any of the other activities of our modern life that are so far from our origins. Mentally, we have unnatural pressures that bear on us all the time. No doubt the link between posture and attitude derives from relationships within our hunter-gatherer community - authority, submission, joy, sadness and so on - but today's life is complicated by the sheer variety and duration of circumstances and information that affect us. Thus a person with an oversized mortgage, an unpleasant commute and an unhappy job will tend to have a worn-out demeanor with the posture to show it: round shoulders and a curved spine.

Good posture at work is important to employers. Providing education, advice and training about workplace posture is an integral part of maximising the investment in employees. Employers now have to invest huge amounts of management time to comply with employment and health and safety legal requirements. Many of these are designed to deal with negative circumstances that arise - ie., they are reactive; investing in prevention is an excellent way of minimising management time overheads. In many businesses employees are the most expensive asset. It makes sense to ensure that this asset can work most efficiently. Therefore something that is fundamental to the individual is fundamental to the employer as well. Modern life is bad for posture and the chances are that any new employee may have musculo-skeletal problems. If this is tackled at its roots, management time is saved; each employee will be giving better value for money, and the employer achieves an advantage over its competitors who fail to act in this area. Enabling a positive approach to posture is a serious competitive advantage.

Working days lost through back pain



- 7.8% inefficiency (566 million)
- MSD days lost (11 Million)
- Holiday (stat min 20) (576 million)
- Potential working days (7.26 billion)

Source: Etcom surveys, 2003-2006

HSE's key messages about musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are:

You can do things to prevent or minimise MSDs;

The prevention measures are cost effective;

You cannot prevent all MSDs, so early reporting of symptoms, proper treatment and suitable rehabilitation is essential.

Exercises to treat and reduce the risk of back pain



Starting position for all exercises is on all fours. Hands should be placed shoulder width apart, arms and thighs vertical. Use an exercise mat if you have



Arch the back, at the same time, look down at the floor. Then lower the stomach towards the floor, hollowing the back and at the same time look up to the ceiling (if you are pregnant you should not do the second part of this exercise hollowing your back, instead keep your back straight). Repeat 10 times.



Slowly walk the hands around to the right, back to the starting position then around to the left. Repeat 5 - 10 times.



Draw alternate knees to the opposite elbow. Repeat 10 times.

Exercises taken from the Active BackCare Guide

How can you help your employees?

Display Screen Equipment (DSE): risk assessment: compulsory for all computer users, incorporated into core training.

Stress: giving users the tools to understand how to reduce stress through their posture.

Laptop users: pain-free use of laptops and carrying them along with files and luggage.

Manual handling in the office: where the risk assessment has been carried out, training employees to ensure that their approach to manual handling is safe from the postural as well as the legal point of view.

General Lifestyle: extending the advice to cover home life, hobbies, children, sport.

Call-out consultancy: When it is clear there is a musculoskeletal problem outside the skills of internal staff, it is time to ask for help.

We offer a range of services and courses to help you and your company manage this problem; this includes Safe Lifting courses, Manual Handling courses, Computer Work Station Assessor courses, and our new Postural

For further information on these and any other Health and Safety issues, contact us at: RSP Safety Services Ltd Archdeaconry House, Gravel Walk, Peterborough, PE1 1YU Tel: 01733 807779 E-mail: info@rpsafety.co.uk