



# LOOKING AFTER YOUR POSTURE

## INFORMATION SHEET

This guidance aims to give you some information about your posture, how best to look after it and how it can be affected when you have a spinal cord injury.

The following information should help you check your posture, know when you might have a problem and when you need to contact a health professional for more advice and support.

### **What does posture mean?**

Posture is the way you hold yourself or position your body when you're standing up or sitting down. Positioning your body can be deliberate or happen without you even realising.



# WHY IS GOOD POSTURE IMPORTANT?

## Good posture can help you:

- look after your skin
- keep your muscles long and strong and your joints flexible
- protect your spine
- breathe properly
- digest your food better
- be more mobile
- stay more independent
- feel more comfortable



## Having good posture can help prevent serious complications such as:

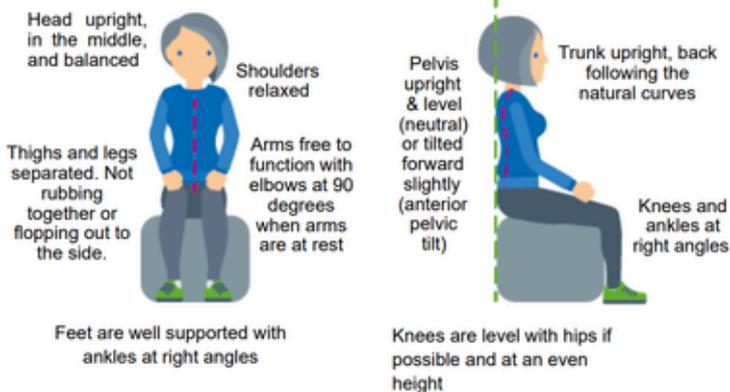
- skin problems, including pressure sores
- muscle tightness, including contractures, where permanent shortening of muscles can cause stiff joints
- spinal deformities (such as scoliosis or kyphosis)
- restricted breathing
- poor digestion
- reduced mobility and independence
- pain and discomfort

# WHAT DOES GOOD POSTURE LOOK LIKE

- Head – aligned, not dropped forward or tilted to one side.
- Shoulders – level and relaxed, not rounded or hunched.
- Back/Spine – supported and upright, avoiding leaning or collapsing to one side.
  - Pelvis – level, sitting evenly on both sitting bones.
  - Legs – supported, hips and knees bent comfortably at a 90° or right angle, feet flat or supported.

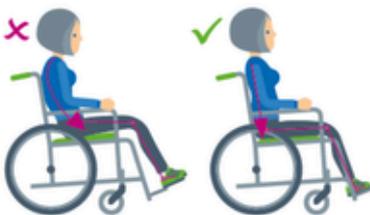
## Recognising good posture

It is not always possible to be positioned perfectly in a wheelchair, due to factors such as muscle tightness, tone and deformity. However, where possible, aim for the following goals:



### Key points for positioning

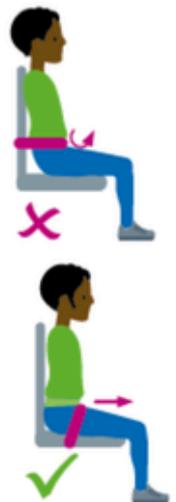
**Make sure the person is sitting right back in the chair.**



- Look or feel to check that there is no gap between the person and the backrest.
- Ensure pelvis is in the middle of the seat. Not shifted to one side.
- If necessary, re-position the person after transferring them into their chair; this may require the person to be hoisted again.

### Fasten the pelvic belt/seat firmly

- As soon as they are positioned back in the seat, fasten the pelvic belt firmly.
- This will promote upper body function, help keep the pelvis in place, allow pressure relieving and discourage sliding.
- Ensure you can get 2 fingers underneath so it is not too tight.
- If a belt is positioned too high there is a risk of damage to the soft tissues of the abdomen and it will allow sliding.



### Use the 'tilt in space' feature if available



- Tilt the wheelchair back if possible when transferring the client into the wheelchair.
- Tilt can be used to maintain a good position by changing the person's centre of gravity.
- Tilt can provide pressure relief.

Image credit: Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

# WHY MIGHT IT BE DIFFICULT TO MANAGE YOUR POSTURE AFTER SCI?

The neurological damage that happens after a spinal cord injury can cause some or all of the following:

- Reduced movement or no active movement.
- The left and right sides of the body having different muscle strength / asymmetry.
- Uncontrolled or involuntary movements (spasms/increased tone).
- Changes in sensation or awareness of where your body is.

All of the above can increase the chance of a poor posture developing over time ... **but there are lots of ways you can reduce the risk of poor posture through support and correction.**

# HOW CAN YOU MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE AND PREVENT POSTURAL PROBLEMS?

- Change your position regularly, whether you're in bed or sat in your wheelchair.
- Avoid being in one position for any length of time, especially twisted or awkward postures, whether you are lying or sitting (in bed or in a wheelchair).
- Know how to check and correct your posture, ideally using a mirror, throughout the day. If you can't do this yourself, then you need to know how to instruct someone to help you with it and feel comfortable asking them to do it.
- Make sure you're using the right cushion and wheelchair for your needs. Remember, if your circumstances change, you may need a review of your wheelchair or cushion. Find out more about this from our [getting a wheelchair](#), [wheelchair cushion](#) and [cushion maintenance](#) information sheets.
- Get help from a medical professional, such as a physiotherapist or occupational therapist, if you need to; for example, if you're unsure whether your cushion is right for you or you need support with checking and correcting your posture.



**Other things that can be helpful for your posture include the following:**

- supportive backrest (one which allows you to adjust the support)
- chest strap (to keep you in a good position)
- orthoses (such as a fabric corset)
- adjustments to your wheelchair, such as changing the amount of recline or tilt.
- cushion adjustments/alterations.
- lateral (side) support pieces to support your body position.
- a personalised programme of stretches put together by a healthcare professional.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU DEVELOP POSTURAL PROBLEMS

**It's always better to prevent postural problems if you can.**

If you're worried about your posture, or concerned that problems are developing, contact a healthcare professional (such as your GP, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or wheelchair service) as soon as possible to get advice, an assessment, and equipment if necessary.

**It's important to determine whether the postural problems you have are 'fixed' or 'flexible'.**

If the posture is flexible, then the skeleton can still be moved, and the problem can be reversed. Equipment can be used to correct your position. If the posture is fixed, then the skeleton does not move out of this position and is 'stuck'. Equipment can be used to support your posture and prevent it from getting worse.

**For more information, visit our [Travel Hub](#) or contact us at:**

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e: [travel@spinal.co.uk](mailto:travel@spinal.co.uk) t: 0800 980 0501 (freephone support line: Monday - Friday 10.00am-4.00pm)