



Physical wonkiness: Posture, sitting and structure



You've probably been told you have pain because of your "bad" posture, because you sit too much or because of some asymmetry in your structure. These might make sense if you view the human body as something as simple as a car or a bridge. Over time that car can wear down and that wearing down can be increased if there are alignment problems.

But the body is an ecosystem. It is not a car. Sitting and your posture has consistently been shown to be poorly linked with pain. Yes, sometimes when we sit for a long period our backs can ache and we have to move.

But there isn't one perfect posture that will let you sit without pain. You might think that slouching forward is bad, or having a shoulder lower than the other is bad. **But these things are normal.** People have them and don't have pain. When we research these ideas they are poorly related to pain. Remember a Key Message: We are built to move. We are built to adapt. **Let's look at things that you can do to help in these areas:**

Proposed Problem: You have deviations in structure or symmetry (leg length inequality, kyphosis, scoliosis etc)

Answer: This one is easy. Don't worry about it. Look around at your friends with no pain. They are all wonky. Everyone has asymmetries. Scoliosis, a bending of the spine, is not predicative of greater low back pain. Draw a line down the middle of your face. You will see you are naturally asymmetrical. Give yourself permission to not worry and stress about these things. Things like scoliosis, kyphosis, differences in leg length, flat feet, knock knees, wide hips, altered shoulder blade positions have all been suggested to be horrible for pain. But none of that is true. These are normal variations we see in people. Pain is not that simple and there is virtually no evidence to suggest that these little differences are a massive problem. Did you know that the first man to lift more than 5 times his body weight had a MASSIVE scoliosis? Or that Olympic swimmers have the same condition. Or that most of the Marathon World Record Holders had flat feet. Don't worry about these things!

Proposed Problem: You've been told you have terrible posture when you sit and stand.

Answer: If it hurts when you sit and you feel better when you move then you should move. You should get up and walk around. You should also slouch if that feels better. Or lean back more if that feels better. There is no one posture that is best. You want freedom of movement and lots of different options. **Don't get caught up in ideal ways to move or stand.** There aren't any. We were built to have a huge amount of options on how to move. Find the ones that feel good for you. You also want to consider the possibility that your pain has nothing to do with your sitting. Look at all the possible contributors to your pain!

Proposed Problem: You've heard that sitting is hard on your back, your back hurts but you have to sit all day.

Answer: This is a really good example of bad advice setting up our expectations and leading us to fail. If you've been told that your sitting is causing your pain and yet you have to sit all the time then this belief can help sensitize you. It's not unusual to be achy when sitting a lot. But the way pain works is that normal achiness can get amplified because of our beliefs or other sensitizing contributors. One solution, in addition to sitting differently and taking breaks is to look at everything in your life that could be sensitizing you. Or ask yourself "How can I be healthier"? You either change the things that sensitize you or you build up your capacity to tolerate those things. Section IV goes through a number of strategies to help. But simple answers are things like understanding pain, getting healthier, engaging in physical activity, resuming meaningful activities and getting help with any emotional stressors in your life that you need to help tolerating. Instead of thinking that sitting is the problem you can build your tolerance to sitting by "building a bigger cup" and working on anything that might be contributing to your sensitivity. Sitting may not be the problem. The pain just shows up with sitting.

