

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Happy New Year!

I hope that you all had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year. Hopefully you have had a good break with time to recharge your batteries. If you made any New Year Resolutions, I trust that you have so far managed to keep them. If not, maybe they were unreasonable for you at the present time and need to be downgraded rather than discarded

How much time do you spend sitting in a chair? Sitting for long periods of time is one of the worst things you can do for the health of your back and your posture. If you are desk bound at work it is important to take plenty of opportunities to move away from your chair, stand up or walk about whenever possible. Be mindful of the way you sit. Do you lean back and allow your shoulders to slump forward? Is your monitor and keyboard the correct height and distance from your body? Do your feet sit comfortably on the floor or do you have a foot stool? If you ensure that these things are adjusted correctly for your height, then you can lessen the poor health impacts of continued sitting.

We also need to be mindful of posture when standing and walking. Poor posture can have several reasons such as muscle weakness or imbalance, laziness in being attentive to posture, or problems with feet, joints or spine. Constant stooping forward will lead to tightness in the chest muscles, impaired breathing and a weak upper back. Try taking a look at your posture next time you are out walking. If you happen to be passing a shop window, pause and take a quick look. You may not be as upright as you imagined. You should be able to draw a straight line down the side body from the ears, shoulders, hips and front of the ankle joints.

To assist with good posture try the following exercises; sit at the front of a chair and take your arms back to hold onto the back of the seat or the backrest (where ever it feels comfortable for you). Draw your shoulders down and squeeze your shoulder blades towards each other. Lengthen your spine and lift the upper chest. Hold this for 10 seconds or more and breathe normally. Another exercise you can do is to turn your head slowly from side to side just as far as it wants to go. You can also take the head to one side, allowing the ear to drop towards the shoulder to stretch the sides of the neck. Of course these exercises should feel good. **If they don't, then don't do them, and consult a medical professional.**

Consider your posture when choosing your exercise program. Tai Chi will make you very aware of posture. Stretching can improve posture by lengthening tight muscles that restrict full movement or cause imbalances. For example if you have a tightness on one side and not the other then it is important to stretch the tight side more than the other to get yourself straightened out! Strengthening can also improve muscle imbalance. It is important to be aware of posture when doing any type of strength training and to focus on building up the weak muscles that prevent you from having the best posture you can.

Good posture helps prevent back and joint pain, makes you look younger, more attractive and confident, and helps you breathe well. So try being more vigilant and tell yourself to sit up straight whenever you catch yourself slouching. **And, most importantly, RELAX! You don't have to be rigid to be upright.** Let your shoulders drop and breathe easy.

Yours in health,

Jeni

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