

Head and neck alignment

If your back is rounded or you work leaning over a work surface with your head bent forwards, the muscles in your upper back, shoulders and neck can easily become fatigued. The result can be a painful neck or headaches – migraine can be induced by chronic neck tension. Whenever your neck feels tense or you hold your head forwards with your chin out, reduce the curve in your neck by pulling your chin back and making the crown of your head the highest point.

The neck retraction exercise (*see p. 135*) reduces tension by bringing the weight of your head more directly over your spine, so that your neck muscles have less work to do.

Relaxing in a chair

Good sitting posture does not mean sitting up straight for long periods. You must relax in order to avoid straining muscles. Anyone attempting to sit bolt upright will, after about ten minutes, slip into a relaxed, slouched position.

The Balans chair

Originally designed in Denmark, the Balans chair (*right*) helps to make you aware of your spine's position from moment to moment. Although it is almost as easy to slouch and round your lower back in this chair, you will probably be more aware that you are doing it. Obviously, this type of chair is not comfortable for people with knee problems. Even if your knees are healthy this chair takes some getting used to.

Transferring body weight

The spine should be held erect with the right amount of curve. Body weight is transferred from the pelvic bones, down the thighs and on to the knees. Ideally, the screen here should be raised to prevent neck flexion.



Chair back

The slight mould of the upright supports the natural arch of the lower back. Ideally, it should be high enough and broad enough to support the full width of the shoulders.

Seat depth

The seat is deep enough to support the full length to the thighs – if it were any deeper the back would be left unsupported.

Chair height

The seat is at a height that allows the feet to be firmly placed on the floor with the thighs horizontal and the lower legs perpendicular.

Choosing a suitable chair

Anyone who spends time sitting down needs a well-designed chair which they can alter to suit their measurements. If your chair does not correspond to the ideal dimensions (*left*), either adjust it or use cushions to bring it up to the correct height or to support your back. The picture also shows the advantage of a desktop that can tilt towards you.

When you relax at home, choose a comfortable chair with enough space to let you change your posture: to avoid strained, tense muscles you must be able to move around while watching television or reading. Cushions placed behind your lower back help to support your spine. Rocking chairs prevent you from sitting still for too long. The gentle motion involved is soothing and helps to relieve backache, particularly in pregnancy.

factors for you to consider include: clear vision (obviously, safety has to come first); controls that are within easy reach; your arms and legs are relaxed; and your body is properly supported, especially your back.

When driving, get into the habit of relaxing your neck and shoulder muscles. Try to become aware of times when you grip the wheel too tightly or hold it too high up and with your arms outstretched. If your shoulders are hunching up towards your ears, develop a relaxed and steady breathing rhythm, and with each breath let go of the tightness in your muscles, slowly dropping your shoulders. Gently work your head and neck back into a more relaxed position against your headrest (*see p. 146*).

Driving

If you suffer from a bad back or from neck problems, driving a car can be an agonizing experience, unless your car is equipped with a good car seat and well-placed controls. Important