

The Surprisingly Easy Move That Can Make You **Health** and Boost Your Energy Instantly

A simple trick for feeling better and getting more done.

BARBARA BRODY May 07, 2018

You've heard that sitting too much just might kill you, mainly because the lack of movement translates to an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. To add insult to injury, it turns out that spending your day hunched over a computer also has major ramifications for your mental well-being.

The issue: Poor posture can put you in a lousy mood and make you feel more stressed and depressed.

"We're a very forward-leaning society—we drive forward, lean forward, slouch over our desks all day," says William Smith, an exercise physiologist in Morristown, New Jersey and co-author of *Exercises for Perfect Posture*. You probably spend a lot of time craning your neck over your smartphone, too.

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No evidence proves that poor posture directly causes serious problems like clinical depression and anxiety. But a number of studies have suggested that it may exacerbate the symptoms of these disorders. Even if your mental health is generally solid, there are good reasons to think that you'd be happier—and healthier—if you simply sat and stood up straighter.

Here are three ways improving your posture will improve your emotional health, and exactly how to do it so you begin scoring the benefits.

You'll feel happier and more energetic

"Over time, sustained slumped-forward posture creates unnecessary stress and strains your spine," says Steven D'Ambroso, PT, DPT a physical therapist with Professional Physical Therapy in New York. "That can make you feel heavy and achy, which leads to being tired and irritable."

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This isn't just a theory; research has actually verified the connection between poor posture and fatigue, especially in people who have depression. One study, published last year in the *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, found that patients with mild to moderate depression felt more alert after simply keeping their back and shoulders upright while sitting. They also reported less anxiety.

Another study, published in the journal *Biofeedback*, came to a similar conclusion: Participants who slouched while walking felt more depressed. When they shifted to a more upright position, their outlook and energy levels increased.

You'll get a confidence boost

When you want to project a confident and comfortable persona (like on a job interview or first date) your stance is key. "If you carry yourself in a certain way"—shoulders back, abdomen in, spine aligned—"it exudes confidence and an affable demeanor," says Smith. The converse is also true: Just picture a sullen teenager whose slouchy posture instantly conveys a sense of apathy.

Maintaining good posture won't only make you look more confident; research shows that you'll actually feel better about yourself. A study in *Health Psychology* found that people who feel stressed can kick their negative mood and even boost their self-esteem by sitting upright. Other research found that good posture was associated with better body image among people with depression.

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You'll be less guarded

When you're slumped forward, you're literally guarding yourself. That may very well mean that you don't feel open to new relationships or ideas, or perhaps that you're actively trying to hide something. "So much of how we communicate is non-verbal, and I've noticed that if someone has a slouched posture or altered gait, it often indicates that there's something they're not willing to talk about or tell you," says Smith. "There's a lot to be said for just standing up, pulling your shoulders back, and saying 'I'm going to face the day.'"

How to perfect your posture

For starters, pay attention to how you're sitting and standing, and remember to engage your core as much as possible. If you have a desk job, make sure your computer, keyboard, and chair are ergonomically adjusted, says D'Ambroso. "I recommend getting up every 45 minutes to an hour to walk around, reposition your spine, and improve circulation," he adds.

Some simple moves can strengthen the muscles that help keep you upright. D'Ambroso likes scapula squeezes: Pull your arms back and pinch your shoulder blades whenever you feel the need to reposition yourself. He also suggests doing 5-10 press-ups (on elbows) every hour or two if possible, which promotes a gentle stretch in your lower spine.

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Any exercises that improve mobility in your hips and stability in your shoulder girdle are also useful, adds Smith. Try planks, back extensions (the "Superwoman" move), or overhead squats against a wall. And don't forget about other mood-boosting activities, like meditation and mindfulness. "These practices are taking off now because people know they need to center themselves," says Smith. "Good posture is just a piece of that."

