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Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

Information for Patients

Posture & Ergonomics

Physiotherapy Service

This leaflet contains information and advice on **posture and ergonomics** and how they can affect muscle and joint symptoms.

Key Messages:

- **There is no best or ideal posture. It is safe to be in comfortable positions**
- **An individual's posture may vary depending on their body shape, environment, beliefs and mood – understanding this can help with how we view our posture and pain**
- **Regularly changing and adjusting our posture is important to help manage pain**
- **Regular physical activity is important for our health and symptoms generally, with flexibility and strength being a key part of symptom management**
- **Common beliefs and warnings to maintain a specific posture or protect the spine are not supported by evidence**

What is posture?

Posture refers to the way we maintain our **body position**. It is often considered by the way we sit or stand.

Posture is highly individual and relates to how the body adapts to different situations and environments. There is no strong evidence that one optimal posture exists or that avoiding certain postures will prevent pain.

Postures may reflect how we feel and think. Postures are sometimes adopted as a protective mechanism, for example if we feel at risk. Being aware of why we adopt certain postures can be helpful in managing our symptoms.

What is ergonomics?

Ergonomics is concerned with the 'fit' between **people and their work**. It aims to make sure that tasks, equipment, information and the work environment are appropriate for each person so that prolonged strain on the body is reduced.

Where is it felt?

Pain resulting from prolonged or unaccustomed postures can present anywhere in the body.

How could it affect me?

- Being in one position for a long time (for example sitting or standing)
- Working in or maintaining an awkward position
- Using difficult or inappropriate equipment
- Prolonged computer or phone use

Pain can affect our willingness to move and ability to carry out daily activities, including work and hobbies.

At times the pain can feel severe. This can affect our general well-being and mental health.

Why does it happen?

It is not fully understood why we feel postural pain. Latest research suggests that muscle and joint pain are not necessarily caused by one particular posture. It is more likely that any position or posture will cause pain if we do not move often enough.

The severity and impact of postural pain is often due to a combination of:

- How we are made (muscles, joints and nerves)
- How we move
- What we think (thoughts and feelings)
- What activities we do
- How fit and healthy we are
- How we do our activities

Is it serious?

Pain associated with posture is rarely a medical concern. Pain in a certain posture may be our nervous system asking us to move, to prevent damage, rather than the presence of actual tissue damage.

Pain can sometimes be a symptom of other medical conditions. Investigations are sometimes needed to rule out other problems. For postural pain, x-rays or scans are not needed.

If your symptoms are not improving or worsening despite following the advice given, please contact us again.

Will it get better?

Pain due to posture is usually short lived and eases once you move and change position. Pain often returns if you continue the same behaviours and habits.

It is important to understand that to reduce pain you should improve your physical and mental health, as well as your posture and ergonomics as best as you can. This reduces the chance of having long-standing pain.

What can I do to help myself?

Regularly changing our posture is important and can be helpful in reducing any posture related pain.

Regular physical activity is key to managing our health. Being fit, strong and active can help prevent or improve our pain.

Remember that our spines are strong and robust structures that can be trusted to move and load in different postures. Adopting comfortable postures is safe, exploring different positions and changing habitual patterns can provide relief from symptoms.

Specific conditions or presentations can influence our postural behaviours and may need to be accounted for, however changing positions frequently, remaining active as able and adapting postural habits still apply.

What can be done to help me?

Further physiotherapy assessment and treatment may be necessary if you have followed the advice given and it has not helped. Being actively involved in your health and well-being is still the most important part of improving your situation.

Ergonomics is part of Health and Safety at Work regulations and you may find useful information from your work's Health and Safety services. Speak to your manager or supervisor for more information.

There is a good chance that you will improve if you follow the advice, you have been given. If you feel you have not, despite following the advice, please contact us again for further support.

You can access further information regarding specific conditions or body areas, symptom management techniques and request further support with the Physiotherapy Service via the Move Better Gwent Website (<https://movebettergwent.nhs.wales/>)

References

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