

sitting with an exaggerated low back slouch, looking straight ahead. Your hip flexors – where the front of your thighs meet the front of your hips – shorten and become tight. Your low back is weakened by the over-lengthening of ligaments. Your shoulders hunch forward, shortening and tightening the muscles of your chest, and over-stretching the musculature of the upper back. Your posterior neck becomes crunched under the weight of your head.

Over-stretched areas become weak over time, and crunched-up, shortened areas remain tight and restrict mobility. This is known as “adaptive shortening,” the effects of which accumulate over years.

Now, take a moment to try sitting with your low back properly supported. You’ll notice your shoulders naturally pull back a bit. Your neck lengthens in the back, allowing your head to sit upright. Feels good, doesn’t it? Just this simple and slight change causes you to activate the proper support muscles, and relieve the strain of those muscles and ligaments that have been under too much demand. Try using a lumbar support pillow at your desk and in your car.

A good tip for long car rides: Adjust the rearview mirror. When you get into the vehicle, sit up and adjust the rearview mirror. Now don’t touch it for the rest of your ride. Rather than adjusting the mirror, adjust yourself. If you can’t see what’s behind you, it’s time to sit up again.

No matter how good your sitting posture is, it is still best to get up frequently, or at least to move around a bit. It only takes 20 minutes for the adaptive shortening described above to start to take effect. It’s hard to walk away from your work or make a stop in your commute when you just want to get to your destination, but it will be best for you in the long run.

Extend your legs under your desk, shift from one hip to the other and stretch your arms above your head. Walk around while you talk on the phone. Get up for a drink of water; most of us don’t drink enough water anyway. While you’re up, you could do a few simple stretches, too. Just these quick breaks from sitting can be such a relief for your back.

If you are concerned that getting up too often is wasting time, consider the idea that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Take preventative measures now to prevent accumulated damage to your body later.

Finally, be patient with your body, and be consistent with your care for it. The changes that have occurred to cause your discomfort took time to produce, and they will take time to reverse. Care for your body, and you will function more productively with less painful distractions.

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