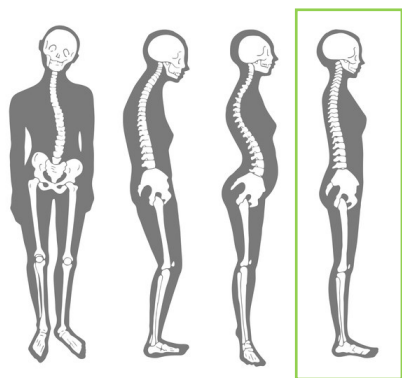


# Posture and Seating

- Posture is important at all times, but especially when holding a posture for a long time
- Seated posture relates to the use of chairs, couches, vehicles, wheelchairs, scooters, power chairs.
- Seating is a source of poor health outcomes - long periods of sitting very still affects your health.

## Introduction

*Posture* is the orientation of your body and how you position your spine and limbs. It covers every combination of positions. The common postures are: sitting, standing, lying and walking. Some postures, like reaching into a fridge or down to a shoe, are brief. Others, like watching TV, driving a car or sleeping, you may be doing for a long time.



*Seating* is the surface or furniture that you sustain a posture on. These all have different amounts of support. For example: a tall stool offers little support and can be tiring to sit on, while a couch is very supportive and easy to stay seated on. The more contact your body has with the seating, the more support it offers, and the less your body has to work to keep a posture.

Some people rely on chairs and seated wheeled mobility devices like wheelchairs, scooters, power chairs. This is usually because they have less tolerance of standing or walking. It may not be easy - and may be unsafe - for them to hold upright postures.

*Sitting time* is a factor recently identified as causing health problems for any person. The more time that someone spends in a seated position, the more likely they are to experience problems.



Problems that can develop from long or frequent periods of sitting include:

- Neck, back, hip, leg and other pains
- Reduced blood circulation and digestion
- Skin irritation or breakdown (ulcers)
- Muscle weakness from disuse

- Tightening of joints and tendons
- Osteoporosis - bone density loss
- Metabolic Syndrome

*Polio survivors* who are inactive (sedentary) are likely to be in the same few postures for long periods. While this can reduce symptoms like fatigue, other body systems can suffer and pain and weakness can increase - worsening post-polio symptoms.

Unlike those with other forms of spinal cord injury, polio survivors can usually feel and adjust their posture when they become uncomfortable. Signals from your body to move should be acted on and not delayed!

### **What is Poor Posture ?**

Common poor posture habits for polio survivors include:

- Weight always shifted to one side
- Slumping (a curved low back)
- Hunching over (curled shoulders or head)
- Locking knee or hip joints when standing



The problems from poor posture get worse the longer you are in the posture. For example, standing with your weight on a stronger leg for decades can lead to arthritis and joint replacements in that leg. Sitting still in a slump and hunching compresses the spine and can lead to back, neck, shoulder and elbow pains.

Posture problems can be reduced by starting with and keeping good posture. Taking posture breaks and using supportive aids (pillows, wedges, splints or bracing) can also help. Setting up or receiving reminders helps.

### **Supportive Seating**

Ideal seating supports your joints, enables even pressures on your skin, and accommodates any imbalance in your body structure. Ensuring these factors helps you to maintain better posture, and to remain more comfortable with less effort. A custom chair may need to be made to best fit your body.

*NOTE: The resources listed in the red box at the end of this fact sheet provide many detailed problem-solution examples for assessing and improving seated posture. There are too many to include on this fact sheet!*

## Polio Survivors Seating Considerations

Questions to ask of yourself about your sitting habits and situation:

- How often am I seated each day?
- Do I take breaks from sitting?
- What causes me to take those breaks?
- What options for seating do I have?
- Can I identify a supportive seat?
- Is my 'usual' seat causing problems?
- Do I need a custom seat or cushion?

Common problems related to body structure and seating for polio survivors with a history of paralysis include:

- Different thigh or leg lengths
- Spinal scoliosis or kyphosis
- Trunk muscle weakness
- Pelvis asymmetry
- Less muscle mass to protect nerves

Sometimes there are simple fixes for the problems you might have with your comfort during time sitting. Some of these include:

- Adding a rolled hand towel behind you to block your back from slumping, or put under one hip to level your pelvis
- Setting a timer or alarm to remind you to change posture or location more often
- Using a chair that can be adjusted

If a simple fix does not work, do not keep trying to 'get it right' for weeks or months!

It is better to get a seating opinion (an experienced eye) going over the seating you have to make recommendations. These people can help with this:

- Wheelchair vendors
- Rehabilitation physicians
- Neurophysios
- Occupational therapists
- Assistive technology store staff

If you have and use a custom chair already, it is best for you consult with those who were involved in its prescription and fitting.

### Further Reading:

Risks of sitting

[www.bit.ly/BHC-sitting](http://www.bit.ly/BHC-sitting)

Posture causes and wheelchair issues

[www.bit.ly/SUNRISEsitposture](http://www.bit.ly/SUNRISEsitposture)

Poor posture and seating solutions

[www.bit.ly/NSWseatingposture](http://www.bit.ly/NSWseatingposture)

*Credits: This fact sheet was developed in cooperation with Denise Currie and Meg Marmo at Polio Services Victoria.*



Health