



## Sitting

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Sitting. Simple right? We all sit. We spend a lot of time sitting. We often sit to relax or rest. Some of us have difficulty doing anything else or are often in a sitting position. Many of us work in a sitting position. Most of us realize it is hard to find a sitting position that is comfortable or a chair that fits. Therefore, it is important to learn more about sitting.

The major problem is that we tend to slouch forward. The absolute worse position for increased pressure on the spine is sitting forward and slouched. This is especially an issue if you have osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). Slouching involves the head coming forward in front of your shoulders, a rounded curve of the upper back, forward shoulders and strain on the low back. **So the first tip – keep your head over your shoulders.** One way to do this is to tuck your chin back (like a turtle pulling into a shell). Also helpful, keep your shoulder blades down and back. Relax the shoulders; don't let them ride up to your ears. The rest of your body follows your head. So head position is important. This is especially important if you are sitting and reading, working at a computer, driving, or doing anything in front of you. As much as possible bring your work to you. Try not to take your head and eyes to your work.

Another issue is supporting your low back. Slouching also diminishes the natural spine curvature and can lead to further back problems. The low back is designed to have a slight inward curve to it. When sitting, that curve needs to be supported. Many of us have tried to do this by shoving our coat or purse or hand in the small of our back for support. **So the second tip – roll up a towel or use a lumbar support in the hollow area of your lower back.** The size of the towel depends on your body. Doing this maintains the natural curve of the low back and decreases strain. Note we are all built differently. If you are smaller, a hand towel might work. If you are larger, a bath towel might feel best. Once you figure this out put a towel in your car or keep one in your favorite chairs at home. If this works for you, remember it is easy to travel with a towel.

Also a problem can be the height of a chair. If you are short, many chairs might be too high for you. Ideally, you should be able to place both feet flat on the floor. **Tip number three – adjust your chair.** If you are short, use a small stool, box or big book under your feet. A good guide is to try to make your knees even with your hips. If you are taller you might try adding a cushion to your chair. If your chair is adjustable, be sure to work at getting it the right height. Take the time to adjust your chair to your height.

The type of chair or sofa you choose can also be an issue. **Tip number four – try to sit on a firmer surface.** Sitting on a chair or couch that is soft and allows you to sink in can be a problem for many. It is hard to maintain good posture on a “cushy” couch. Recent research has shown that you don't need to sit up straight as a board. Sitting with the back of your chair slightly tilted back is OK. Good news for all the lazyboy sitters! Another idea is to sit on a large ball. In many ways chairs are a problem for us because we were not made to sit still all the time. So consider sitting on a big ball. Doing this keeps the body from being too stagnant and helps work the core musculature more. Plus, it is fun! Bouncing on a big ball always brings a smile to the face of my

patients. The ball like a chair should fit you. When sitting on a properly fit ball your knees and hips should be in a line.

So now you have been sitting, what is the best way to get out of a chair? **Tip number five – scoot to the edge of your chair and stand up straight.** Sitting back into a chair often means leaning forward before you stand up. This can create strain on your low back and need a lot of effort. Scooting to the edge is easier and less stressful on your back. If you are having trouble getting out of a chair, try sitting in a chair with arms. Use the arms of the chair to push yourself into a standing position.

More than half of us spend eight or more hours per day sitting – at work, at home, or propped up in bed. Trying a few of these tips can help you survive sitting. If you have problems or pain with this activity – see your doctor. I recommend a few appointments with a physical therapist to help return you to full function. You can find a physical therapist at <http://www.apta.org/apta/findapt>.

Enjoy Sitting!

### **About the Author**

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