

A GOOD POSTURE SLIMS YOUR BODY
AND EXUDES CONFIDENCE TO OTHERS

WALKING TALL

Nothing paints a picture of your confidence better than the way you carry yourself. While you might like to blame this season's giant handbag or your sky-high Manolos for your stooped shoulders and slumped posture, chances are slouching is a sign of your state of mind. Like wearing Primark trackies and no make-up to the office, poor posture is a classic giveaway of a self-image seriously stuck in the doldrums.

Life coach Irene Jordan says: 'Slouching screams, "I don't consider myself important". It sends a signal to the outside world that you wish you were invisible. Simply by holding yourself better, you can deliver a massive confidence boost, and make a good impression at the same time.'

There are other benefits to improving your posture too. Personal trainer Matt Roberts, who's worked with Madonna and Naomi Campbell, claims women can look like they've 'Instantly dropped 10lbs by improving the way they hold themselves: standing up straight, with their abdominals held in. Even clothes will fit and fall better'. Working on your posture can also help you avoid back pain: an estimated 75 per cent of the UK population suffer from back problems at some point, often caused by bad posture.

So, what can we do to stand straight and walk tall? Fitness expert Gemma McCartney from Lifetime Training says: 'Poor muscular balance, fitness levels and excess weight can all affect posture, as can sitting cross-legged and wearing heels, both of which are detrimental to your pelvis and spine alignment. Pilates can help as it focuses on the deepest abdominal

muscles, strengthening you from the inside out, helping to improve core stability.'

It's yoga, however, that can have the biggest all-round effect. Yoga guru Danielle Nicholls says it's the sense of body awareness yoga creates that is key. 'All the mistakes women make with their posture – sticking their pelvis forward, slouching – come from a lack of awareness of how to make the body work at its best. Simple yoga techniques can help change that, bringing about wellbeing and body confidence.'

The Alexander Technique is the ultimate in posture perfecting. The original Alexander was an actor who needed help with breathing control, so he devised a technique to help prevent lazy postural habits that can cause tension, pain and a sluggish feeling in the body. Taking an Alexander Technique class can help you to 're-programme' everything from where your shoulders sit, to how wide you stride, making it perfect for slouch-offenders.

If good posture is underpinned by self-confidence and self-belief, how can we fake what may not be there in the first place? Body language expert Judy James says: 'When you feel shy, you tend to curl up and use barrier gestures, which make your posture seem more negative. Stretch up to your full height, bring your shoulders back and down, arch your back slightly and make sure your weight is evenly divided on both feet, and you'll instantly feel better.'

Making time for yourself is vital to wellbeing. Confidence coach Dawn Breslin says: 'Me-time is about recognising the value in your life, it's about loving and respecting yourself enough to ensure you meet your ►

Practising yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi will help you stand and sit properly

TRY THESE TOP 10 TIPS WHEN YOU REALLY NEED TO RELAX, RELEASE AND RECHARGE

- 1 Say ta-ta to technology**
Switch off your mobile and leave the BlackBerry in your briefcase. It's easy to forget how wonderfully liberating it can be to be totally out of reach.
- 2 Reconnect with the people who matter**
Losing yourself with friends, family and partners can remind you of what's really important and offer some perspective on life.
- 3 Put yourself first**
Do something you really want to do, even if it's only for an hour. The sense of escape can be hugely calming.
- 4 Have a good laugh**
A few hours spent laughing will release endorphins, relax your muscles and boost your batteries.
- 5 Do something physical**
Don't panic, it doesn't have to be the treadmill: gardening, walking in the fresh air or swimming can be meditative and totally refreshing.
- 6 Try a random act of kindness**
The old adage 'to help others is to help yourself' holds true. Spread a little feel-good fairy dust by doing something nice for someone.
- 7 Rediscover reading**
Shut out the real world and forget your worries: a good book can uplift, inspire, engage and just plain entertain you, clear some time to curl up and wind down.
- 8 Stop thinking and take action**
Stress makes you feel blocked and unable to act. Adopting a positive mantra attacks the projects weighing on your mind. The relief afterwards will be immense.
- 9 Don't sweat the small stuff**
Striving for perfection at work, home, or with your appearance all adds up to one big ball of stress... and disappointment. Prioritise what's important, plan some goals and let the rest go.
- 10 Visualise something relaxing**
When stress bites, use a creative visualisation technique: picture a place or occasion where you were happy and focus on it. This should fortify you and bring confidence flooding back.

Denise recommends ...

... I became aware very early on that there was no point in fearing failure – you don't get anywhere by holding back, only by trying things. Success actually comes from failure, most successful women will tell you they've had a lot of failures before they had success.



own needs as well as the needs of others. If you negate you, your life will feel empty, you may feel resentful and like your life is a routine existence. Sometimes we need to stop and connect with who we are, what we want from life, and we need to experience life instead of just doing it.'

On those real "fat and frumpy" days, understanding what's happening inside our heads can help us look better on the outside, says psychotherapist Taylor Glenn. 'Negative thought processes can cause us to spiral into self-sabotage,' she claims. 'Suddenly a bloated tummy turns into "I'm ugly, I'm worthless, nothing ever goes my way...". This is called "cognitive error", instead of using reasonable logic and positive focus, your brain is flying

off on tangents, which lead to negative emotions. Another form of cognitive error is when we magnify. Instead of saying "My stomach may be flatter tomorrow", you think "I look awful. I never look as good as my friends".'

So what to do? Taylor says to reason with yourself: 'Recognise you're not having the best of days and that cognitive errors are going to occur – and then try to catch and correct them. Say to yourself: "Tomorrow I'll probably see things in a more positive way". Be gentle with yourself when it's a bad day: take extra time on your lunch break to go for a walk, or speak to a good friend. And most importantly, become more "time-limit aware" – usually a confidence slump won't last long, and it's good to remind yourself that bad days are a normal part of life and tomorrow you'll be walking tall again.' **BA**

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