

Balancing Act!

Repositioning Poor Posture!

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Poor posture is prevalent in older adults. As we age, it is common for the head to move forward and the shoulders to round, which can cause chronic back and neck pain.

Years of inattention to how the head and shoulders are positioned can lead to tight pectoral muscles and weak upper-back and neck muscles, which can result in postural kyphosis. At the same time, the Achilles tendons and hamstrings become tight, and the feet begin to shuffle and scuff the ground while walking. Unless you suffer from advanced osteoporosis, this unattractive way of standing or sitting is a learned behavior. Fortunately, incorporating several stretches and strengthening exercises into your routine can decrease your risk for kyphosis posture and keep you upright.

Incorporate these stretches for better posture and gait. Hold each stretch posture for 30 seconds. Breathe deeply as you hold the pose.

The “W” Stretch (for upper back and neck). Back is against a wall; knees are bent slightly. Step about 12 inches away from wall with both feet. Contract abdominals with shoulders, back and buttocks against wall. Without lifting chin, try to touch back of head against wall. Bring arms up to make the letter W. Bend elbows at shoulder height, wrists above elbows and palms facing forward. Keeping body against wall, draw arms back until elbows, wrists and hands touch wall.

Standing Hip and Thigh Stretch. Hold onto wall or backrest of chair. Bend right knee and grasp right foot with right hand. Back shouldn't arch. Knees should be side by side. Repeat with left leg.

Standing Hamstring Stretch. Place right heel on low step so leg is almost straight. Supporting left leg should be slightly bent at knee. Slowly lean forward until you feel slight pull in back of right thigh. Repeat with left leg.

Standing Calf and Achilles Tendon Stretch. Stand with hands on wall or other stable object. Keeping right leg straight with heel flat on ground, step forward approximately 24–30 inches with left foot, then lean forward, bending left knee. Repeat with other leg.

