

# Check Your Posture

**Gillian Greenwood**

New standard operating procedures for dentistry, in response to the pandemic, have created additional daily pressure for the profession. Do any of the following ring true for you?

- Increase in number of hand scaling procedures to limit AGP
- Patients requiring more treatment and increased number of visits after lockdown
- You find yourself giving emotional support to patients who want to talk about their experience of the last year
- The time-consuming protocols required
- So many more layers of PPE
- More surgery cleaning

The list goes on...!



■ **Figures 1-3:** Good posture and working with space between the patient and the hygienist

GOOD POSTURE

■ **Figures 4-6:** Bad posture using the legs of the stool to stabilise and leaning in on the headrest for support. They also show leaning in for a better view, hence the need for loupes or an eye test



It's not surprising that you may find your appointments over running which in turn makes you neglect your posture whilst trying to catch up and get on with your day. My hygienist clients have noticed that when they are running late, they fall back into a default unnatural posture.

## How to sit with good alignment on your saddle stool

Does resting your toes on the stool feet sound familiar? When you first sat on the stool you probably put your feet firmly down on the floor. However, in time, you discovered that you could rest your feet on the stool feet. This might seem ok at first, however you will gradually collapse your spine until your shoulders hunch. You will then probably find yourself leaning on the head rest. This in turn will make it harder to hold your instruments, let alone use them effectively.

## Check your posture throughout the day

Try doing each exercise separately, then see if you can travel with your mind's eye up and down your body 'ticking all the boxes' as you perfect your position.

### Standing

- Bring your weight to your right foot, then to your left foot then find the centre.
- Move your weight forward, as if you are impatient. Move your weight back, as if you were standing at the edge of a cliff. Now move your weight slightly forward, slightly back etc. to find your middle perfect position.
- Really concentrate on feeling all your toes, balls of feet and heels on the floor.
- Take a step forward still leaving the toes of your back foot in contact with the floor. You will need to use your abdominal muscles to keep

you balanced. Now move one or both of your arms slightly forward and notice how you need to use your core muscles to keep you standing in good posture.

- Try performing everyday tasks whilst in this stepping forward position. You can alternate legs after a few minutes.
- Drop your 'tail' towards the floor and gently lift your tummy up and under your 'belt'. This is a very subtle movement.

### Standing or seated

- To release your neck, turn your head a centimetre to the right (or left) then back to the centre. Just do this once to one side only to release any tension building up from holding your head still for any length of time.
- You need to connect your upper arms, your triceps, to your mid back. Then lift up through your pelvic floor and tummy - transverse abdominals. You then connect all those areas together i.e. arms into back, back into abdominals and also pelvic floor. This is your 'centre'.
- Send your 'hat' to the ceiling to 'grow' as tall as possible.
- Make space at all of your joints: ankles, knees, hips, vertebral column and neck.

### Seated

- Think of your thighs like 'feet' stretching forwards to help release your hip flexors.
- Send your feet down into the floor weight level under them (remembering that resting them on the stool feet is not a good idea.)
- Sit directly on your 'sit bones' the right and left ischial tuberosity.

## Exercises to do at home whilst seated or standing

### Neck release

- Roll your shoulders all the way up to your ears, all the way forward, downward and backward. Then reverse. Leave them in the relaxed downward position.
- Lift your shoulders up to your ears as high as possible and then let them 'drop' down.

### Pelvic floor

**Variation 1:** Lift the pelvic floor suddenly and hold for a second, then relax.

**Variation 2:** Lift the pelvic floor gradually as if it's an elevator you are going up in! When you get to the top floor gradually allow the pelvic floor muscles to relax. Gradually let the elevator descend.

### Consider getting a sight test

The longer you spend working the more you are using your eyes. This can lead to eye strain. To balance out all the close-up vision, consider looking far away every now and then so that your eyes get to focus on distant objects as well. If you have a window to

look out of you can focus your eyes for 30 seconds on a distant tree, for example. As our eyesight deteriorates, we tend to just lean in to get closer to the patient to see. Consider instead investing in loupes or have an eye test regularly so that you can hold your correct posture.

In the March edition of *Dental Health* I explained that we need to address two types of movement to be fit; explosive movements and also the fine accurate movements which are necessary to treat patients' mouths. Our bodies need to be strengthened in order to accomplish these fine movements without hunching (using the neck) and bending over (using the back).

Have another look at my article if you'd like to be reminded about finding the arm and lower trapezius connection, multifidus, pelvic floor and transverse abdominal muscles.

My dental hygienist clients tell me that they really feel the benefit of attending my Pilates and Yoga classes. For more exercises check out my Zoom classes and ebook "Pilates and Lifestyle by Gillian Greenwood" is available from Amazon for the Kindle.

**Author:** Gillian is a Body Control Pilates® and Yoga teacher with over thirty years teaching experience, gaining her education in Los Angeles, New York and London. She also teaches pre/post-natal exercise, ballet for absolute beginners and stress management, presents workshops, writes articles for health magazines. Over the years her clients have included: Julian Clary, Flora Fraser, film director John Irvin, singer Marcella Detroit, the Princess of the Arab Emirates and the Princess of Thailand. She is an AFAA Associate Consultant and Examiner, (Aerobic Fitness Association of America).

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