



Fix Your Posture to Maximize Muscle

Without even looking at you, I'm pretty sure you have a posture problem. That's because almost everyone I see has a posture problem.

After years of evaluating clients at my fitness center in Indianapolis, I've learned to spot an anatomical abnormality from the way a guy walks through the mall, sits on a park bench, or stands at a bar.

The trouble isn't just that slumped shoulders make you resemble a Neanderthal. Over time, your poor posture takes a tremendous toll on your spine, shoulders, hips, and knees. In fact, it can cause a cascade of structural flaws that result in acute problems, such as joint pain throughout your body, reduced flexibility, and compromised muscles, all of which can limit your ability to burn fat and build strength.

But don't worry—all these problems can be corrected. Are you ready to straighten yourself out? Use this head-to-toe guide to make sure your posture is picture-perfect.

Analyze Your Alignment

Strip down to a pair of shorts and ask a friend to take two full-body photos, one from the front and one from the side. Keep your muscles relaxed but stand as tall as you can, with your feet hip-width apart. Now compare your photos with the illustrations below to diagnose your posture problems. Then see the following repair plans.

—BILL HARTMAN, P.T., C.S.C.S.

Build a Better Back

"Scapular retraction" sounds like a surgical procedure—and, for all we know, it very well may be.

But in the weight room, it's a muscle action that strengthens the middle part of your trapezius, one of your back's biggest muscles.

The Movement:

Pull your shoulder blades (scapulae) together in back (retracting them). The exercise: any variety of row -- seated using a cable machine; bent-over with a barbell, dumbbells, or T-bar; or standing, pulling a cable down to your face.

Latest Retraction:

For something a little different, try the bow and arrow, suggests Craig Ballantyne, C.S.C.S., a strength coach in Toronto. Attach a stirrup handle to a high cable pulley. Stand with your right side facing the weight stack, as if you were a left-handed archer. Grab the handle with your left hand and hold it in front of your face, like a bowstring you're about to pull back. Now pull it back and to the left using midback muscles, pause, return to the starting position, and repeat. Do one set of 10 to 12 repetitions with each arm for starters. Add one set each workout, to a maximum of three sets. This will build strength and muscle mass in your scapular retractors.

—BRUCE WAYNE

