

# HEALTH

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## From Head to Toe

PROPER POSTURE IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS SITTING UP STRAIGHT, AND YOU CAN'T ACHIEVE IT BY WALKING WITH A BOOK ON YOUR HEAD. DO THESE SIX AMAZING MOVES THREE TIMES A WEEK TO HELP YOUR BODY WORK ITS BEST.

BY KATE DALEY

**THE PRO:** Sahra Esmonde-White, co-founder of the Essentrics fitness program

## POSTURE PERFECT

"Good posture doesn't apply to everyone the same way – you have to consider your own natural curves," says Teresa Gravelle, clinical specialist in musculoskeletal physiotherapy at the University of Ottawa Sports Medicine and Physiotherapy Centre. And forcing yourself into a "proper" position can actually make things worse. "We've seen patients who, after being told to sit up straight, use the large torque-producing muscles that surround the back, which are meant to be used in hard load situations. They end up compressing their rib cages, putting pressure on the heart and lungs. To achieve that 'ideal posture,' they're just compressing all of their vital organs." Fixing improper posture isn't as simple as strengthening, either. It's often about releasing tension, retraining the brain and letting go the muscles that are overactive. "People tend to overuse certain muscles on one side of the body, and that leads to tension and pain. The body will provide a protective response and, in doing that, will cause more muscles to tighten up, leading to faulty movement patterns that further contribute to pain. Generally, people have to learn to move differently," says Gravelle. If you're feeling stiff or achy, see a physiotherapist, try free-flowing movement exercises like yoga, tai chi or Essentrics and, if you sit at a desk all day, make sure to get up and move around (extending your arms and stretching).



**1 SHOULDER BLASTS** With your bum pulled in and your back curved, grip the fingers of both hands together while contracting your shoulder blades. Separate your fingers and extend your arms to open

up your back muscles. Lift your arms to the ceiling, then with palms outward, open your chest by bending your arms and extending them downwards so your shoulder blades come together. Repeat the series twice.



**2 CORE & CHEST** Start with your arms bent at chest height, your palms facing down. Lunge to the side with your arms extended forward and your back straight.

When you're in the lunge position, keep your arms straight and spread them open wide towards your back. Repeat the series three times per side.



**3 CORE STRENGTH** Tighten your abs and lunge to one side, keeping your hips level. Extend your arms above your head, then, with

palms facing outward, pull arms downward into an L-shape. Return to standing. Repeat the series three times per side.



**1 SIDE LUNGES** Lunge to one side, keeping your hips level. Extend your arm and then grab the wrist of the top arm with your bottom, slowly

pulling in the direction of the lunge. With arms still outstretched, use the wrist of your bottom arm to push the top arm backward into a stretch until they are

both just slightly behind the head. This is a fluid movement, so move gently through each position. Repeat the series on the other side.



**5 HAMSTRING & CHEST COMBINATION** Start with one leg fully extended on a chair, your bum pulled in and your standing leg bent slightly. Your foot can be pointed (for a

shin stretch) or flexed (for a calf stretch). First, lift your arms to the ceiling. Then reach upward with one arm while bending the opposite arm. Repeat the same stretch with the other arm. After

doing both sides, extend hands upward, then spread arms back in a bent position behind your head, contracting your shoulder blades. Repeat this series three times per leg.



**6 SPINE & CORE MOBILITY** Gripping a chair, stand with your feet slightly apart, knees slightly bent, spine rounded and bum pulled in. Rotate

your shoulders forward and slowly shift your hips from side to side. Stand back as far from the chair as possible while still keeping legs straight, then gently

bend at the waist until you feel a stretch in your spine. In that position, bend your knees and shift your hips from side to side again. Do the whole series once.

**> GO ONLINE:** Check out our video version of these six posture exercises at [canadianliving.com/posturemoves](http://canadianliving.com/posturemoves).