





STRENGTHEN THE BODY TO AWAKEN THE MIND

A Brief Guide to Dynamic Sitting

by Barbara Bluestone



Our Bodies Were Made to Move

Evolution designed us to walk and run, to chase prey across the plains, to stalk in the forest, to crouch around a campfire—but not to sit rigidly on a chair for long periods of time. We were made to move.

Our spines depend on twisting to bring fluid to the intervertebral disks. Without motion, our intervertebral disks shrink and dry, causing us pain. Our abdominal muscles need to be kept strong through usage to keep our bodies upright and supple. Our blood needs to circulate freely.

Backache is a Leading Cause of Absenteeism

For thousands of years, chairs were only for ceremonial use: thrones for kings. Ordinary people worked too hard to sit still. Sitting for long periods of time wasn't common until the Industrial Revolution, just 150 years ago.

And that's when our problems started. Hunching, slumping and slouching on rigid benches and chairs in factories, offices, and classrooms has created a worldwide epidemic of aching backs, sore shoulders, and stiff necks.

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In the U.S., back-related injuries are the most common work-related injury and the leading cause of all absenteeism among workers. Every year, about 70% of office workers develop lower-back pain.

Even younger people are not immune from the effects of sitting too long and in the wrong way. Today, many young people spend more time at computers than playing outdoors, and as many as 30% now suffer from back problems.

Traditional Chairs Encourage Poor Sitting

Traditional rigid chairs which “support” the body in fact only promote slouching and make our muscles passive and weak. Most chairs lock the body into a rigid position, hindering circulation, promoting slumping.

And so the muscles designed to help us—the core and back muscles—slacken from disuse. Secondary muscles carry out tasks for which they are not intended. Your body goes out of alignment and you feel pain, numbness, a stiff neck, shoulder pain, backaches, or sciatica...the list of ills is long.



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Sitting motionless in a rigid chair dulls the mind, whereas small constant movements keep the body—and the mind—alert, aware, awake.

Even many so-called ergonomic office chairs only aggravate the pain. To start with, most people don't bother fiddling with levers and buttons to adjust height and tilt. As for lumbar support, as soon as you begin to work at your desk, you tend to lean forward and not use it. In fact, we don't need lumbar support. Think of the broad-based pelvis as a ship, the spine as the mast, the muscles as the braces—and the whole as a beautiful ship designed to sail us through life.

Too bad so many people think they have to live with “a bad back.” Often they just need to sit properly.

The Proper Way to Sit

Even when we sit, we are shifting through a whole range of large and small movements. Movement stimulates blood circulation and maintains flexibility.

Doctors agree that we need to strengthen, not “support,” our bodies. You should sit up naturally, using your own muscles instead of leaning passively against a seat back.

Your core muscles, which hold the body upright, are engaged and stimulated. Your spine achieves its natural curve. Your pelvis gently moves forwards and backward, Your hips sway from side to side and your legs extend and stretch. Your body feels a new ease and freedom.

Dynamic Sitting Keeps Us Healthy, Alert, and Productive

The body moves, the mind is stimulated. Babies learn by reaching out, rolling over, crawling. Children play, touch, build. Adults modulate moods, increase learning, even overcome brain damage...through exercise.

Mind and body are intimately connected. In fact, we process movement and learning with the same part of the brain. And movement sends oxygen to the brain, resulting in a greater ability to concentrate and learn. Sitting motionless in a rigid chair dulls the mind, whereas small constant movements keep the body—and the mind—alert, aware, awake.



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Dynamic Sitting Keeps Bodies Supple and Flexible

For years, doctors and physical therapists have recommended dynamic sitting for their patients because dynamic sitting works. Pregnant women relieve pelvic pressure sitting on a slightly unstable surface. Nursing mothers rock to soothe their babies—and keep themselves serene. Rehabilitation patients gently strengthen core and back muscles. Obese patients learn body awareness which can help them lose weight.

Vigorous exercise is great, of course. But even non-exercise activity thermogenesis, called NEAT, is necessary. In fact, the Mayo Clinic reports that “NEAT is far more important for calorie-burning than exercise in nearly everyone.”

Dynamic Sitting Improves Learning

Students spend much of each day hunched at desks and computers. Schools devote ever-fewer hours to physical education. Childhood obesity is on the rise. More and more young people



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suffer from backaches and musculoskeletal problems. The answer is, not surprisingly, exercise.

Small movements are important too. From kindergarten to college, teachers across America report that when students sit actively, for example on exercise balls, misbehavior and sick days decrease. Students pay attention, test better, and learn more.

Studies are underway to understand why. Researchers believe that dynamic sitting allows students to maintain an “optimal arousal level” in body and mind to increase concentration.

 **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** As Chief Ergonomic at ErgoErgo, Barbara Bluestone is passionate about active sitting. In fact, her search for a cure to an aching back led to the founding of the company and ErgoErgo’s unique patented design. Barbara has had a wide-ranging career in international marketing and product development with Disney Consumer Products and other companies.



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