

How Seated Posture Can Improve Mood and Decision-Making

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Your posture does more than affect physical comfort; the way you hold your body also provides feedback to your brain that influences your mood and behavior
- › Researchers changed tablet height to naturally encourage upright or slumped sitting and found that these subtle posture differences affected risk-taking even when participants weren't consciously thinking about how they sat
- › Participants in a more upright, expansive posture gradually took greater risks during a decision-making task, yet they earned more overall without experiencing more failed trials
- › Actual neck position helped explain differences in pride and positive or negative feelings, suggesting that arranging your workspace to naturally support good posture may matter just as much as consciously reminding yourself to sit up straight
- › Raising your screen, keeping devices out of your lap, optimizing your desk and chair, taking regular breaks from sitting, and supporting your spine during sleep help prevent your environment from continually pulling your body into poor positions

Most people think about posture in terms of neck strain, back discomfort or ergonomics. Your posture, however, also sends information to your brain. This concept is known as postural feedback, meaning the position of your body helps shape how you interpret and experience your emotional state.

That makes your everyday environment important. A monitor that sits too low, a laptop placed on your lap, a phone you check dozens of times a day, or a tablet held below eye level quietly pulls your head forward and rounds your upper body, even when you didn't consciously decide to slump.

A 2026 study in the British Journal of Psychology suggests that these subtle shifts in how you hold yourself don't just affect comfort; they're tied to measurable differences in mood and risk-taking behavior.¹ The results suggest that the passive influence of your desk, chair and screen height matters more than whether you deliberately try to sit up straight.

The Way You Sit Shapes Your Mood and Decisions

For the study, researchers took a different approach from conventional "power pose" experiments, in which people are deliberately instructed to hold an open, expansive posture intended to convey confidence or dominance.² Instead of instructing participants to sit upright or slump, researchers adjusted the height of a tablet so the environment itself encouraged either an **expansive or contracted posture**.

Everyday posture usually develops the same way. You respond to the height of your monitor, chair, desk or device rather than consciously deciding how to position every part of your body. The researchers then tracked actual **neck position** on video rather than assuming the setup produced identical posture in everyone. That gave them a more realistic measure of how each person responded physically to the environment.

- **Risk-taking increased gradually rather than all at once** — The researchers used a task that required participants to inflate virtual balloons, with each additional pump increasing both the possible reward and the chance that the balloon would burst. Participants could stop and collect their earnings at any point. Both posture groups became more willing to pump the balloons as the experiment progressed, but that increase was noticeably steeper in the expansive group.

That time pattern is important. The groups didn't simply begin the experiment with dramatically different behavior. Instead, their choices separated progressively across repeated decisions. The difference between groups across trials was statistically significant, and a second analysis of how risk-taking changed over time supported the posture effect.

- **Greater risk didn't translate into worse performance** — Taking more risk sounds negative, but the results were more nuanced. Researchers examined not only how far participants pushed the balloons but also how often balloons burst and how much money participants earned. This allowed them to distinguish greater willingness to accept risk from simple carelessness.

The expansive group earned more overall, while the number of exploded balloons didn't differ between groups. In practical terms, the more upright participants weren't simply clicking recklessly. They accepted more risk without suffering more failures on the task, suggesting that posture influenced the way they balanced risk against reward.

- **Actual neck position mattered more than a simple posture label** — Mood results also revealed an important distinction. The researchers didn't find a straightforward overall effect in which everyone assigned to the expansive setup automatically felt better. Instead, actual neck angle helped explain changes in pride.

Neck angle also predicted changes in emotional valence — essentially, how positive or negative participants felt. It didn't, however, predict emotional arousal, which reflects how activated or energized a person feels rather than whether those feelings are pleasant or unpleasant.

This tells you why simply commanding yourself to "sit up straight" misses part of the story. People respond differently to the same physical setup. Measuring what the body actually did captured differences that a basic upright-versus-slumped label could overlook.

- **The effects remained when people didn't know posture was being tested** — Most participants reported little or no awareness that the experiment was altering their posture. Researchers went a step further and repeated their analyses using only participants who reported no awareness whatsoever that tablet position was manipulating how they sat.

The general pattern for mood and risk-taking remained, although the smaller group reduced the statistical strength of some comparisons.

That finding strengthens the real-world relevance of the experiment. You don't have to consciously think, "I'm adopting an expansive posture," for your physical environment to affect how you hold yourself. The researchers specifically noted that common features such as desk height and chair ergonomics could influence mood or behavior through these subtle posture changes.

- **The results are useful, but they don't apply equally to everyone yet** — The researchers acknowledged several limitations. Participants came mainly from a student population in Canada, most were young women, and the study wasn't preregistered, meaning the research plan and analyses weren't formally recorded publicly before the experiment began.

The authors also noted that posture research has faced replication problems, so these results need to be viewed alongside additional studies rather than treated as definitive proof by themselves.

There was another practical complication: People slump differently. Some participants lowered their heads toward the tablet, while others leaned forward from their hips. Both counted as contracted positions under the study's neck-angle measurement, yet those positions aren't necessarily identical in how they affect you.

Make Good Posture Easier with Your Environment

The root problem isn't that you forget to "sit up straight." Your surroundings continually influence how you position your body. If your screen sits too low or your setup forces you to look downward, you'll naturally bring your head forward and collapse your upper body toward the device. Instead of relying on constant reminders, arrange your environment so a comfortable, upright position becomes the easy choice.

- 1. Raise your screen to support a naturally upright position** — Start with the environmental factor tested in the study: screen height. If you [spend hours at a computer](#), position your monitor so you don't have to repeatedly lower your head or bend forward to see it.

Pay attention to what your body actually does after you settle into your normal work. If your head gradually drops or your upper body folds toward the screen, your setup is still encouraging a contracted position. Adjust it until you're able to look forward comfortably without forcing yourself into a rigid pose.

- 2. Stop working with your laptop or tablet in your lap** — A device positioned far below your natural line of sight encourages you to look down. If you regularly work from a couch, bed or chair with your device on your legs, raise it onto a stable surface that allows you to keep your head and upper body more upright.

You don't need to turn good posture into an all-day test of willpower. Make the physical environment do more of the work for you. The study demonstrated that changing tablet height was enough to naturally produce differences in how participants positioned their bodies.

- 3. Hold your phone at eye level instead of looking down at it** — The study tested tablet height, but the same principle applies every time you check your phone. Holding it low, which is what most people do, drops your head forward and loads your neck with significantly more force than a neutral position. When you're reading, scrolling or texting, bring the phone up to your line of sight rather than dropping your chin to meet it.

Better yet, reduce the time you spend on your phone in the first place. Every minute you cut from **unnecessary scrolling** is a minute your neck and upper body aren't being pulled into a contracted position. It's one of the simplest ways to protect your posture, not by fixing how you hold the device, but by picking it up less often.

- 4. Adjust your entire workstation instead of focusing only on your neck** — Your screen is only one part of the equation. Look at how your desk and chair work together because the researchers identified desk height and chair ergonomics as everyday environmental factors that influence posture.

If you're a desk worker, sit down exactly as you normally would and notice what happens without correcting yourself. Your goal isn't a stiff, exaggerated "power pose." You want a setup that makes an open, comfortable position feel natural rather than something you have to consciously maintain.

- 5. Stand up and take regular breaks from sitting** — Even with a well-designed workstation, you don't want to remain seated in one position for hours. **Stand up** and take regular breaks from sitting throughout your day. Use natural stopping points — finishing an email, completing a call or wrapping up a task — as cues to get out of your chair.

If you're a desk worker, make these breaks part of your routine instead of waiting until your neck or back feels stiff. Stand, walk around briefly and change your body position before returning to work. This gives your body a simple reset and prevents good posture from becoming another form of prolonged, static sitting.

- 6. Support your spine while you sleep** — Your posture doesn't stop mattering when your workday ends. Your sleep setup gives your spine several hours to recover from the positions you hold during the day, so arrange your bed to keep your neck and spine comfortably supported. If you sleep on your side, place a pillow between your knees. If you sleep on your back, elevate your legs with a wedge to take pressure off your spine.

Your pillow matters as well. A cervical pillow designed to support the natural curve of your neck without pushing your head too far forward can help maintain a more neutral posture during sleep. The goal is the same day and night: Shape your environment so your body doesn't have to fight against it.

FAQs About Seated Posture, Mood and Decision-Making

Q: How does seated posture affect your mood?

A: Your body position provides feedback to your brain that helps shape your emotional state. In the study, participants' actual neck position was associated with changes in pride and how positive or negative they felt, showing that how you physically hold yourself matters.

Q: Does sitting more upright affect decision-making?

A: Researchers found that participants encouraged into a more upright, expansive posture gradually took greater risks during a decision-making task. They also earned more overall without experiencing more failed trials, suggesting they weren't simply acting recklessly.

Q: Do I have to consciously change my posture to see an effect?

A: No. Researchers changed tablet height rather than telling participants how to sit, and most had little or no awareness that their posture was being manipulated. Similar patterns remained when the analysis was limited to participants who reported no awareness of the manipulation.

Q: How can I improve my posture while working at a desk?

A: Arrange your workstation so staying upright feels natural. Raise your screen so you don't repeatedly look downward, avoid working with a laptop or tablet in your lap, adjust your chair and desk together, and stand or walk periodically instead of remaining seated for hours.

Q: How can I support better posture while I sleep?

A: Your sleep setup should comfortably support your neck and spine. If you sleep on your side, placing a pillow between your knees helps support your position. If you sleep on your back, elevating your legs with a wedge and using a cervical pillow that supports your neck's natural curve provides additional support.

This article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult a qualified healthcare provider before making changes to your health regimen.

Sources and References

- ^{1, 2} [British Journal of Psychology June 2, 2026](#)