

{Q} I have a tendency to slouch whenever I'm sitting, and because I have a desk job, I sit for a long time. Is there anything I should be concerned with other than a slouched appearance?

Absolutely! Slouching is a downward spiral that can lead to back pain, disc degeneration, loss of height, weight gain, fatigue and digestive and circulatory problems. The good news: You can transform sitting into an activity that revs you up instead of drags you down.

“Active sitting” strengthens the core, relieves back pain, increases alertness and burns twice the calories as slumping. Like anything worth learning well, it's all in the how:

- Place both feet on the floor.
- Find your sitbones and sit on top of them (not behind them).
- Pushing down into your sitbones, point the top of your head (not your face) away from your seat, lengthening the spine and creating as much space as possible between your seat and your crown. Think of sitting as making a triangle: Your two sitbones form the base of your triangle, and your crown, the pinnacle.

You'll feel better right away because you're giving your organs the space they need to do their jobs, using muscles instead of degenerating joints and raising your metabolism naturally. They say it takes 28 days to create a new habit, so you'll need to be vigilant to affect long-term change. But the rewards more than repay the effort.

{Q} Do you know of any benefits to yoga that aren't normally talked about?

Yes, it's common for people to get taller when studying yoga. How can we get taller once we've stopped growing? First let's look at why we tend to get shorter. Because of gravity, the S curves of our spine tend to deepen as we age. We can't do much about gravity, but we can negotiate our response to it.

In Yoganetics, we focus on the space between vertebrae, lengthening the secondary curves and reorganizing the musculature around this new alignment to support us in everyday life. One student in her 70s was 4 feet 11 inches tall and had always dreamed of being 5 feet tall. During her years with me, she exceeded that mark and became taller than when she was a teenager! People can always tell when my (7 feet tall) husband is doing yoga because he has to duck under doorways. When he's out of practice, he slides right through.

{Q} What are some common faux pas we do that affect our bodies in ways we'd never believe?

Since breathing is automatic and we've been doing it all our life, we must do it pretty well, right? Not really. Most of us use just 17 percent of our astonishing 3-quart lung capacity. I see this every time I ask a roomful of people to take a deep breath: shoulders go up, chests rise, jaws tighten, necks shorten. That's not a deep breath; that's a very shallow breath!

The downshifting from shallow to deep breathing is similar to moving from the baby pool to the ocean. Its effects ripple out to every corner of the body (oxygenating blood, which flows to everything) and every corner of our lives (lowering blood pressure, reducing stress levels). As babies we did it right, so we have to re-learn a process that was once natural. That's one of the great gifts of yoga training: a single breath can be the bridge between stress and peace.

Another paradox: We put on high heels to look longer and get taller, but heels actually shorten the body. Worn over time, heels shorten the calf muscles and deepen the lumbar and cervical curves, foreshortening the spine. Not to mention restricting our ability to move or run if necessary. 📌

back to basics

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Wyatt Townley is the founder of Yoganetics and has taught yoga for more than 35 years. She specializes in gentle yoga for unique bodies, and her work has been featured in *Yoga Journal*, *Dance Magazine*, *Parents*, *Self, Body & Soul* and *The New York Times*. Her book, *Yoganetics* received a starred review from *Yoga Journal*. Visit yoganetics.com for details on her classes, books and videos.

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