

PERINATAL HEALTH & WELLNESS:

Posture and Pain



6 months pregnant with Rylan, Emery almost ONE!

Why Posture Matters

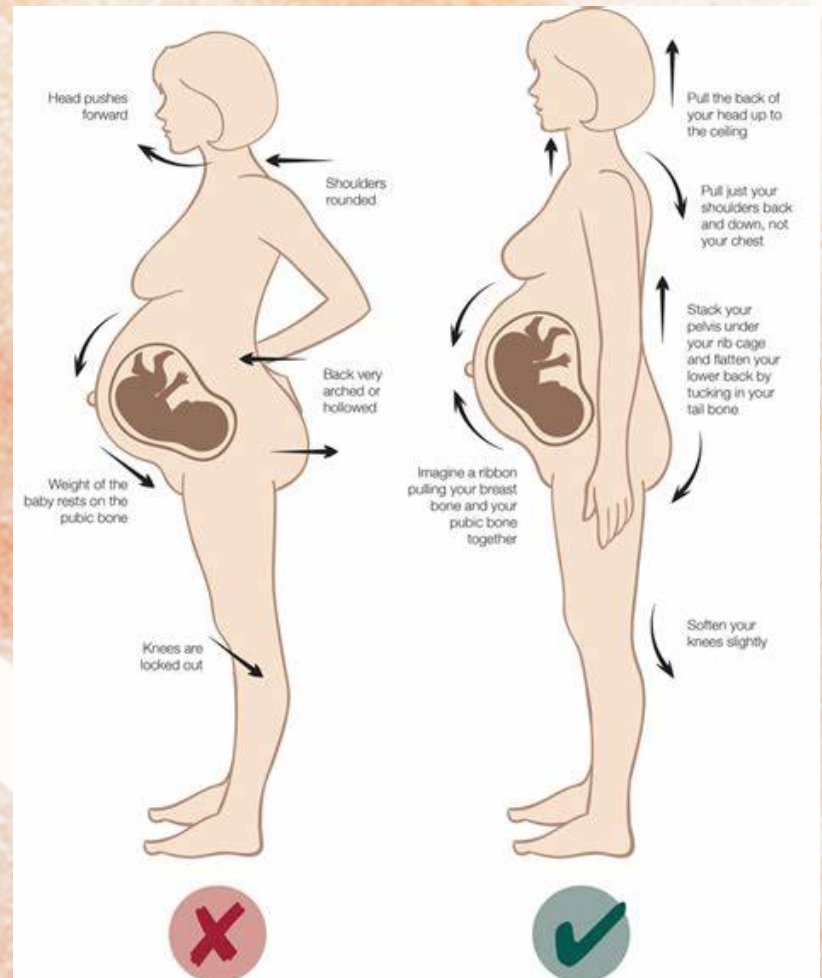
When you're pregnant and after your baby arrives, your first instinct (and I totally get this!) is to find a pre/postnatal workout program to help you get fit, stay fit, look great, and feel great. This is ABSOLUTELY important. However, that workout session is usually about an hour. What about the other 16 hours of wake time (even more for the new mommas)? How you move during the other waking hours of your day can make a BIG difference, especially when it comes to reducing pregnancy pains and injuries, and definitely for ensuring a quicker recovery time postpartum.

What does this mean? This means that even doing well during a pregnancy or postpartum training program, you're missing out on HUGE benefits of proper alignment, so this is the very FIRST thing you should focus on. When you have proper posture, you are eliminating excess tension from being placed on your body (especially your core/pelvic floor muscles) which have enough stress on them during pregnancy. Eliminating unnecessary tension helps mitigate issues like diastasis recti, pelvic floor dysfunction, lower back pain, or SI joint pain. During the postpartum period, reducing excess tension of the core muscles with poor posture helps you recover quicker, and help heal properly from any residual diastasis recti or pelvic floor issues.

What is Neutral Alignment?

You can see what neutral alignment looks like in the image on right. When your body is in neutral alignment, your body is stacked in a way that reduces stress on your muscles and soft tissues because your bony structures are keeping you upright.

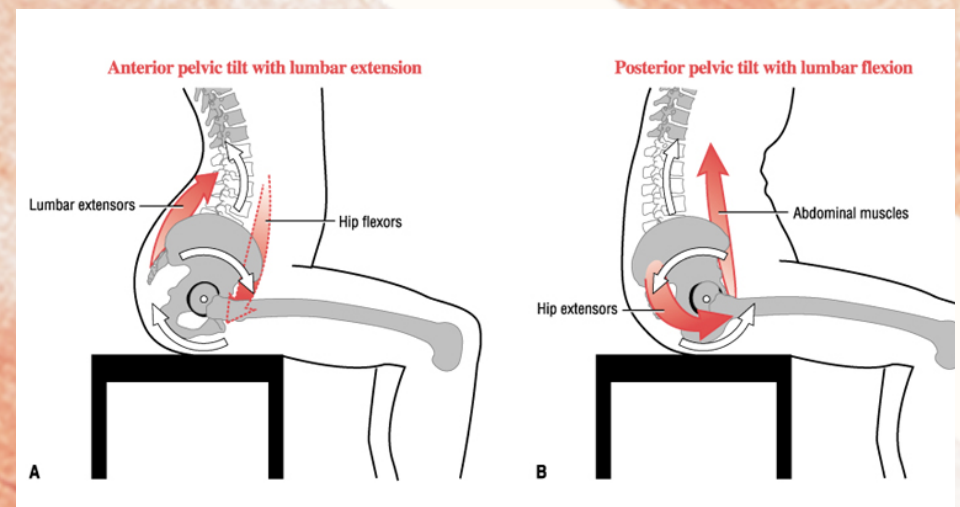
However, if your body is out of neutral alignment (like on the left) this increases stress on the soft tissues (your abdomen) and now they must help support your body. This position is the most common posture of pregnancy: anterior pelvic tilt, rounded shoulders, and protruding head.



What should you look like?

If you have a full length mirror you may need to use this to find your neutral and make a note of what you have to correct in order to get there:

- Ensure there is a straight line from your ear, shoulder, hip, knee, and ankle.
- Ensure your rib cage is parallel to your pelvis.
- Think “flashlights forward.” If your lights point to the ground, you’re in an anterior tilt (right photo) and if they point to the sky, you’re in a posterior tilt (dead butt)



Posture During ADLs and Exercise

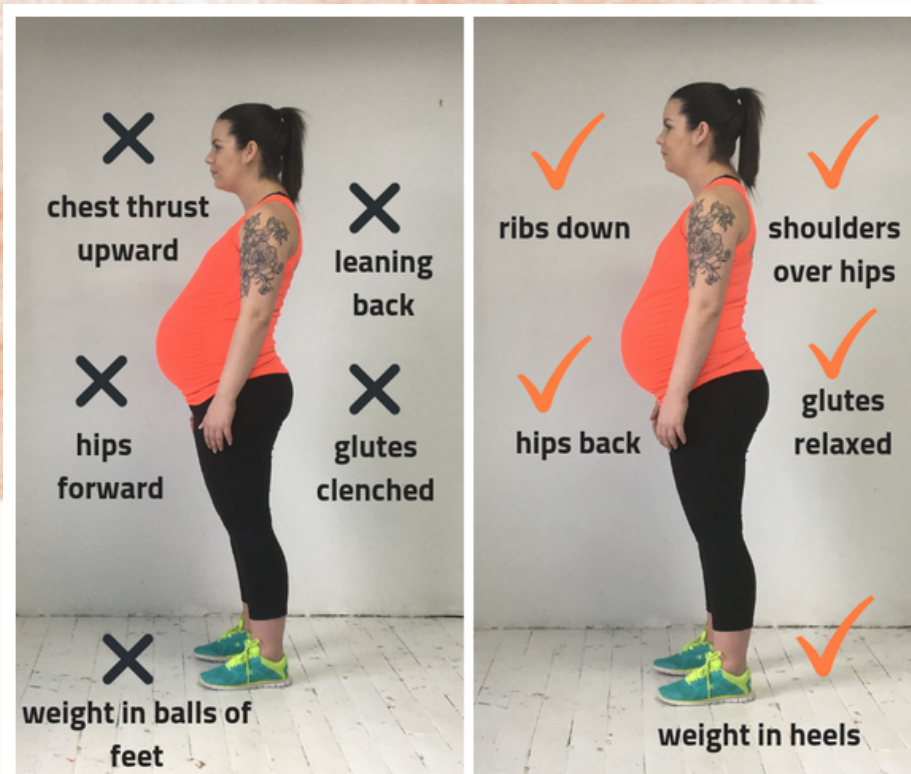
As an Occupational Therapist, I am NATURALLY going to talk about Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and as a personal trainer, I'm going to talk about exercise! So let's talk about posture during these activities!

- **Posture issue: Anterior Tilt:** The weight of the growing belly often tips the pelvis forward into an anterior tilt (or excessive lower back arch). Usually, the larger the belly, the greater the shift. This tends to increase pressure outward onto your abdominal wall, and downward onto your pelvic floor, which can lead to a greater risk of developing diastasis recti and pelvic floor dysfunction:
 - ADLs affected: ALL OF THEM! You stand to do dishes, brush your teeth, shower, put laundry away. You sit with an anterior tilt all day at the office, while eating dinner, while sitting on the exam table at the OB/Gyn's office. This is a LOT of time putting pressure on your abdominal muscles, causing a weak core and back pain.
 - Exercise: Your bird dogs, overhead triceps extensions, back squat... all affected by excessive anterior tilt. So now you've compounded the stress from the baby with gravity and weights.
- **Posture issue: Rounded shoulders:** The weight of your growing breasts and weakening back muscles from lack of activity often pull your upper back forward into flexion, resulting in a rounded shoulders posture. This is often exaggerated in the postpartum period from all the baby feeding and carrying. Many new moms spend most of their time in a “triple flexed” position (shoulders, elbows, wrists), which can lead to upper back and neck pain, as well as carpal tunnel.
 - ADLs affected: Feeding baby, changing diapers, playing with baby on floor, typing on computer, reading a book. All of these create more of a rounded shoulder posture.
 - Exercise: Your chest muscles will shorten / tighten due to a rounded shoulder posture. This affects your performance of many upper body exercises and can create possible shoulder (impingement) and upper back pain.

Posture During ADLs and Exercise

(Continued)

- **Posture issue: Posterior tilt:** Overtime, women tend to shift into a posterior pelvic tilt to counteract the weight of their growing belly. They'll typically push their pelvis forward and creates a lack of natural lower spine curve and an excess curve in the higher part of the spine. This can contribute to a tight posterior pelvic floor and glutes that don't work as well (hence the name "dead butt.")
 - ADLs affected: ALL OF THEM! Any ADL where you're standing is going to be affected by this position. It is important to be mindful of the way your pelvis is shifted and if your glutes are tense. This compensatory posture can create pelvic floor issues and pain. While seated on a comfortable couch, it is also easy to sink into a posterior tilt. Use pillows to correct your posture
 - Exercise: Picking up a barbell, reverse flyes, bent over rows, leaning over handlebars during spin class, and working your tail off on that row machine will be affected by this position. To prevent pain and injury, keep your spine neutral, hips back, and head/shoulders relaxed. Raise the handlebars on your spin bike to prevent issues with alignment.



Source: Bing Images <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/d6/16/3d/d6163d28025419fba8185b0ad09db37d.png>

Moving in Neutral

If you're reading this guide and reevaluating the way you stand, move, and exercise, then GREAT! I want you to think about how you move throughout the entire day, in and out of the gym. So here are tips:

- **Get used to doing full body checks throughout the day.** Are you stacked properly? Is your belly pushed forward while in shower? Is your butt clinched while doing the dishes? Is your head sticking out while texting? Is your belly resting on your thighs, or are you able to engage your core and lift it off of them?
- **Seated posture matters:** Whether sitting at the office or feeding your baby, mind your posture. head back, shoulders back and down, pelvis stacked.
 - When nursing, don't bring your breast to baby, bring the baby to your breast!. Use back support, foot rest, and nursing pillow to get your body into a comfortable position.
- **Bending over:** Do not bend at your waist. This puts pressure on your spine, which is weighted down by baby belly or baby. Send your hips back, keep your spine long. Practice proper bending whether it's picking up a sock from the floor, picking baby up from the crib, or picking your toddler up from the bathtub.
- **Getting out of bed or off the couch:** You would be surprised how many clients of mine have NO IDEA how to get out of bed. I tell them: "You are not a vampire, don't sit straight up!" This visual usually stick, thankfully! To prevent extra intraabdominal pressure, roll to your side and push yourself up with your arms.
- **Exercise properly:** If you start a pre/postnatal fitness program, focus on **FORM FIRST**. The moves may be "pregnancy safe" or explicitly "for postpartum recovery" but if you do not know how to complete these exercises with proper alignment, without managing intraabdominal pressure, or without understanding what the proper range of the movement of the joints are (which is important to know since your body is pumped with relaxin, a hormone that puts you at even greater risk for hypermobility and injury), you are putting yourself at risk.

FORM AND SAFETY FIRST

Questions?



A well-prepared momma is a happy momma.

1:1 Virtual services include education and training on:
Pregnancy and postpartum mental health and wellness

Preparing for the "fourth trimester"

Communication with partners, safeguarding your relationships

Infant / Toddler safety and development

Personalized pain management, ergonomics, and home setup tips

Personal training services for pre/postnatal clients



Link in Bio

<https://mindfulmommatherapy.com/>