

# Postural Care

## What a difference a day makes



## Postural care

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As a child begins life they are unable to independently achieve a balanced and symmetrical posture.

As the child grows and develops they learn to move through balanced and symmetrical patterns of movement.

It is generally agreed that children with neurological impairment such as Cerebral Palsy and those with multiple disabilities move in less symmetrical movement patterns. They are at risk of developing postural problems, such as hip dislocation, scoliosis and pain. Additionally, they may develop difficulties with digestion and eating and drinking, if not managed correctly.<sup>1,2</sup>

By understanding why certain postures cause body shape to alter, we can intervene and help to delay or prevent deterioration. Implementing postural care can maintain or improve body shape and physical ability. This can be achieved by having carers skilled and supported in using good positioning techniques and appropriate equipment.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

The earlier the intervention, the better – but it is **never too late** to start protecting and restoring someone's body shape. (Mencap, 2011).<sup>6</sup>

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1. Greater Glasgow & Clyde Group of Allied Health Professionals (2009) Guidance on "Good Practice" for the Provision of 24 hour Postural Management. Glasgow: NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.
  2. North West Group of Paediatric Physiotherapists & Children's Occupational Therapists (2007) Good Practice Guidelines to 24 hour Postural Management (Draft). Manchester: NHS Manchester.
  3. Whinnett, J. (2010), PAMIS: supporting people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and their families for a better life, *Posture & Mobility*, 27(2), pp. 16–20.
  4. Hill, S. and Goldsmith, L. (2008), Posture, mobility and comfort in Carnaby, S. and Palwyn, J. (eds) *Profound intellectual and multiple disabilities: Nursing complex needs*, Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 328–347.
  5. Whinnett, J. (2011), Craig's experience and the care campaign, *PMLD Link*, 23(3), pp. 15–16.
  6. MENCAP Postural Care Action Group, (2011), *Postural Care: protecting and restoring body shape*, London, Mencap.

## Max

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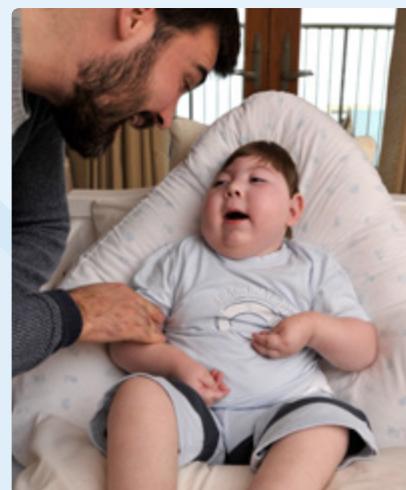
Max is only four years old and has complex medical needs. I recently found out about postural care and the positive benefits it could have for Max. Once I had received training I couldn't believe the simplicity of the idea. We didn't need a doctor or medication to help, only having the right information and support from people like Max's physiotherapist.

It can be really hard to deal with the diagnosis of your child but there is still a need to know about the importance of good postural care, for me it is knowing what I can do at home to keep Max in a good symmetrical position. The sooner you can intervene and protect their body the better.

It has now become second nature to my husband and me; we feel more in control of protecting Max's body shape.

**Claire**  
*Max's Mother*

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# The importance of postural care

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When a person has a neurological impairment it is important to think about their posture throughout the day and night.

Therapists call this 24-hour postural management. Poor posture and positioning can lead to muscle and joint problems.

## Factors affecting posture can be:

### Low Tone



This is when muscles are floppy and don't support the skeletal structure properly causing poor posture and balance.

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### High Tone (spasticity)



This is when muscle tension becomes tighter and can cause muscle shortening. This can lead to loss of joint range and movement and the joint can become fixed. When joints become fixed this is known as contractures.

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## Poor posture can lead to:

### Scoliosis

Curvature of the spine can be caused if muscles around the spine have high or low tone. This can put pressure on organs and affect breathing and digestion. It is extremely important to maintain symmetry of the spine throughout a 24-hour period.

### Pain

Pain can result from joints that are held in poor positions or from muscle spasms. An imbalance of muscle pull can increase the risk of joint dislocation, which can also cause discomfort and pain. Treatment for joint problems can involve surgery and a lengthy recovery period, which can be avoided through good positioning.

**By implementing 24-hour postural care, these problems can be alleviated, prevented or improved.**

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# Robert

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Our son Robert is unable to verbally communicate and has Cerebral Palsy spastic quadriplegia.

When Robert was very small he cried a lot, especially during the night. We thought this was how it was going to be.

During this time Robert was at nursery in his wheelchair, spending time with his physiotherapist and using his standing frame. When he came home I would relax him out on his beanbag and enjoy a cuddle on the sofa.

We later discovered that Robert was suffering a lot of pain, requiring corrective surgery to both hips. At this stage it was vital that Robert's hips were protected in a correct position for the future.

Robert now uses a sleep system at night to protect his body from distortion. When this was introduced, we took things slowly, bit by bit, at Robert's pace, and never gave up.

Since implementing 24-hour postural care we have noticed significant

benefits to Robert and therefore to all the family. We now have a boy who is less distressed, sleeps better and is free from the pain in his hips.

Although Robert only uses partial sight we feel he is able to take in more information about the world around him, enjoying family times with his twin brother.

This has had a dramatic change to our family day and night.

**David & Frances**  
*Robert's Parents*



# Kara

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As Kara was 17 and we had been involved with physiotherapy since she was six months old, I assumed I knew enough about postural care – I was wrong!

Kara experienced a lot of pain and I now know that some of that was due to her positioning. She is mainly positioned in her wheelchair or easy chair but she also needs to have a stretch out of these and lie in bed at night. What I didn't know was the importance of her being in a symmetrical position all of the time.

I now look for Kara's head to be centred and her pelvis to be aligned regardless of where she is positioned. Night time positioning is particularly important as she is unable to move around at night. If she wasn't positioned properly she could develop further deterioration in her spine, hips, legs and ankles.

Thinking about positioning 24 hours a day is really important, not just knowing that your child is in a good position in their wheelchair or standing frame.

Since being more aware of Kara's position I have noticed significant benefits to her. She isn't experiencing the same level of pain; she is able to breathe better too. To help other people know that they have Kara in a good position, I have taken photos of her especially when she is sleeping. This has been useful particularly for respite.

**Kate**  
*Kara's Mum*



# Holistic benefits of postural care

## Swallowing

An individual's posture and positioning has a big impact on the safety of their swallow. Good posture and positioning supports a safe, controlled and co-ordinated swallow. Poor posture and positioning can lead to a swallow that is difficult to initiate, is uncomfortable and is uncontrolled. This can mean a swallow that is unsafe, as the person's airway may not be protected, which can lead to food and fluid entering the lungs. This is called aspiration, which can lead to chest infections, fever and aspiration pneumonia. Aspiration may also occur when content from the stomach enters the lungs. Again, good posture and positioning reduces the risk of this happening.

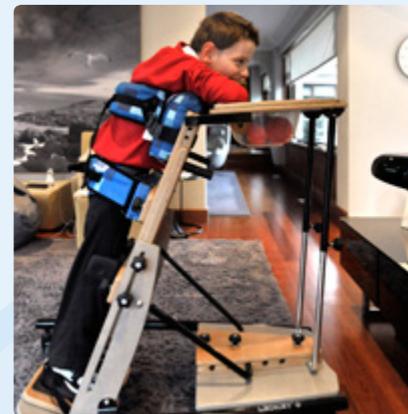


## Digestion

Good positioning helps to support digestion which will reduce problems of reflux and heartburn.

If the person being cared for requires to receive nutrition, fluid and medication through a tube, management of good positioning is really important to reduce the risk of aspiration.

Maintaining good posture can help to allow the person to feel included at meal times, which are very social occasions, even if nutrition is through a tube.



## Communication

Good posture and positioning can allow a person to interact with their environment and others by using gestures, speech, objects, photos and behaviours. When a person has good posture and is in a good position, there can be more opportunities for communication. An individual approach to positioning will be needed to make sure the person is in the best position for good communication.

## Being Involved

Posture is vital to our level of function and greatly affects our ability to be able to carry out and be involved in daily tasks. Good and appropriate posture can be the difference between a person being involved or not.

When sitting, we need the right support to create a stable body. By being in a stable position, the person can have the best opportunity to have functional use of their limbs, body and head. This can make eating, drinking and being involved in activities easier. It is known that the good posture or position may feel unusual or uncomfortable at first, but this can be built up over time. Being involved in an enjoyable and purposeful activity can help increase a person's tolerance to their new position.



## Ross

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My name is Ross and I am 22 years old. I have Cerebral Palsy and use a wheelchair. This means that I have to make sure that my posture is good as I spend a lot of time in one position.

I have been lucky, as I have always had brilliant help and advice from my physiotherapists in both children and adult services. This means that any problems are dealt with very quickly. When I was younger I had dislocated hips and I had to have three operations to fix them.

I use a standing frame at home to do exercises and stretches with my dad's help. I also go to hydrotherapy. These help make sure my posture is as good as it can be.

I have a special sleep system that helps me sleep in the correct position as my legs always want to lie on one side and that makes my back feel sore. My spine has a little curve in it and I know that everything that is being done will help to make sure that it doesn't get worse as I get older.

When I was about 20 I had a really big growth spurt and it caused me a lot of problems with very bad back spasms and going to the toilet was very painful. I had to go into hospital three times in a year because of it.

I am glad that I have done all the things that my physiotherapist showed me as I know that it could have been a lot worse.

### Ross



## Factors that can accompany postural care

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### Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy assessment and advice plays an important role in postural care. This can include active exercise and passive exercise programmes, seating assessments and advice, night time positioning and advice on sleep systems, hydrotherapy and rebound therapy programmes. Physiotherapists can also provide assessment and advice on the use of standing frames and orthotics.

### Surgery

Surgery is only used where spasticity is severe and cannot be managed by medical or physical measures. A neurologist, paediatrician or orthopaedic doctor would give further information on this.

### Medication

Spasticity (high tone) can make it difficult for the person you care for to carry out their postural care programme correctly. Medications such as Baclofen, Clonazepam and Tizanidine can be used to reduce spasticity, as can Botox and Phenol injections. Your GP can advise you on medications and make a referral to a neurologist, if required.

### CPIPS

Cerebral Palsy Integrated Pathway Scotland was launched in 2013. This is a follow-up programme for children with Cerebral Palsy or suspected Cerebral Palsy. The programme involves a protocol of physiotherapy assessment and pelvic x-rays. The goal is that every child achieves the best function possible. More information can be given by your physiotherapist.



# To find out more about postural care:

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## Visit

the PAMIS website:  
[www.pamis.org.uk](http://www.pamis.org.uk)

## Contact

the PAMIS Head Office by telephone  
on 01382 385154

## Watch

our Postural Care film featuring family stories. You can do this by visiting the PAMIS Scotland YouTube channel.

## Contact your local physiotherapist or occupational therapist:

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Produced by: Family carers, PAMIS and NHS Lanarkshire Specialist Allied Health Professionals.

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