

# Workplace Wellness



## The Yoga of Sitting

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I am a dental hygienist and movement educator focused on yoga and strength training. The following article is intended to raise awareness of supportive seated posture. It should not replace the advice of a medical professional (physician, chiropractor, physiotherapist, etc.). If you are in pain, please seek individualized medical advice from your health care provider.

How many times have you started a workday with great posture and then a stressful situation arose?

You start to run behind. You go into autopilot to get things done. You skip lunch and forget to stay hydrated. You catch yourself twisting and bending in a way that looks nothing like how you know you ought to be sitting. Inevitably, you start to experience the aches and pains that distract you from your work. We may not maintain perfect posture all day, but remembering what healthy posture feels like can help us return to good posture throughout the day. This is one of the ways that my movement practice has benefitted me most off the yoga mat.

Before we get started, a quick note about the “core.” I hear a lot of rhetoric about the core that only mentions the superficial abdominal muscles at the front of the body.

Let’s expand on that by imagining the core as a cylinder that includes the entire trunk from just under the skull, all the way to the pelvic floor (the muscles spanning the base of the pelvis) and everything in between: neck, ribs, hips, back, front, and sides.

Now, take a seat as you normally would. Notice your feet on the floor and imagine a triangle with its base along the ball of your foot (extending across the width of each foot) and the tip of the triangle in the centre of the heel. Use this triangle to plant your feet, spreading your weight evenly throughout your triangle. Check to see that your knees aren’t collapsing inwards towards your big toes. Instead, try gently pressing your knees towards your middle toes.

Start gently rocking your pelvis forward and back. Find a happy medium where your tailbone is not tucked too far under or creating an exaggerated curve in the low back. Notice the height of your chair under you. Does lifting or lowering the seat allow you to feel more stable?

Check to see if your ribs are flared forward creating an exaggerated curve in your back. If so, imagine you are gently holding something between the lower ribs and the upper pelvis, without slouching in the area of your upper





back. Take note of how this helps your shoulders maintain a good position. If you collapse the upper part of your cylinder (slouching) it becomes harder to use the whole cylinder to support your ribs and hips.

Slowly nod your head yes, then no, and find a position with your neck and eyes that allows you to work without excessive tucking of the chin or extension of the neck forward. Remember that the neck is also a part of that core cylinder.

With your hands on your thighs, can you hinge with your pelvis and maintain your cylinder? Can you stay planted through the feet and still use a pedal? Can you maintain stability through your cylinder while using your arms?

Lastly, a little bit about breathing. Observing your breath is awkward as we almost immediately try to change something. Try to observe and count only. This also takes practice, but the benefits are well worth it. Breathe only through the nose. Notice your next inhalation. Try to not force the breath in any way. With your next exhalation practise taking a silent breath without sighing through the mouth. Counting down from five to zero with each inhalation, observe where your breath moves in the body. To help ensure you are breathing efficiently, try to maintain the integrity of your cylinder, which also maintains the integrity of your posture and spine. Cool, right?

By noticing how your body feels in an intentional set-up, you can start to notice when that set-up changes and make supportive adjustments. Aim to note how things feel in your body rather than strictly adhering to specific angles, heights or how you think your position ought to look.

It will take some time to become familiar with this set-up. I started practising it during the few minutes before our morning meeting. Now that it's second nature, I do a quick scan every time I sit down with a client. The more we intentionally take a position, the better our bodies get to know that position. Give it a try, and please let me know what differences you notice!



▲ You can find a short video to help you find & maintain your cylinder here: [www.cdha.ca/yogaFormula](http://www.cdha.ca/yogaFormula)

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