

*** A simple sequence to improve your posture, strengthen your tummy and ease your lower back.**

Feeling and looking lithe and fit is as much about posture as anything else. While you're reading this, draw your navel back towards your spine, lift your chest and take your shoulders back. You should feel like a fifties movie star now! What you have just done is to lift your lower abdomen and lengthen your lower back, which levels the bones of your pelvis and puts the weight of the abdomen into the 'bowl' of the pelvis, where it belongs, instead of dropping over the front and giving you a belly! Lifting your chest and taking your shoulders back makes more space around the front and back of your waist, giving it a 'nipped in' feeling, and of course relieving the pressure from your digestive organs....so as part of your long-term regime, bear in mind that you need to counteract the effects of gravity. Use your posture, particularly your spine, and re-align your skeleton to support your 'organic' body. (This is particularly effective when you're walking – think, 'Up the front and down the back'.)

This short routine will also help to strengthen the longitudinal, transverse and oblique muscles around the front and back of your waist, your 'corset'.

- 1. Sitting on a chair, feet flat on the floor and knees pressed together, place your right hand outside your left knee and your left hand on the back of your chair. Turn your trunk to the left, breathing steadily, and turning your head last of all. Do these twists slowly and use your exhalations to help you turn a little more, keeping your shoulders level – ask someone to tell you if one has lifted, as it's hard to see for yourself.(20 seconds.)
- Come back to the centre and repeat to the right. (20 seconds.)
- Repeat to the left and right once more. (40 seconds.)
- (If you are comfortable sitting cross-legged on the floor, you can practice this pose sitting on a couple of blocks. The purpose of the extra height is to lengthen your lower back – most important to level your pelvis, as described above.)
- 2. Lie down on the floor and put one of the blocks under your sacrum – this is the hard bone at the back of your pelvis, just above your tailbone. Bend your knees over your chest, arms by your sides. Breathe in. As you breathe out take your arms straight over your head, stretch them along the floor behind you, and at the same time push your heels up towards the ceiling, aiming to straighten your legs. Hold this 'L' shape for three slow breaths in and out, bringing your knees back down to your chest and arms by your sides on an exhalation. Rest for three breaths.

- Repeat this three times, finishing by putting your feet flat on the floor wide apart, knees bent and together, to allow your abdominal muscles to rest.
- 3. Take the blocks out from underneath. Bring your knees up over your chest again. Place your arms on the floor, straight out at shoulder height, backs of the hands to the floor. Keeping your knees in line (that's the tricky part!) take them slowly down towards the floor on your right, and slowly back up again. Repeat over to the left, keeping a slow and steady rhythm to the movement and the breathing. (You will need to stretch and open the opposite ribs and waist to try and keep that shoulder on the floor. This takes time and gets a little better with each repetition. Don't rush it!) Do this three times on each side then put your feet apart on the floor, knees bent and together as before and rest. Repeat for three each side again.
- 4. To finish, lie with your back on the floor and your legs resting over the seat of a chair. (Put the chair sideways so you have room for your feet.) The side of the chair should come right into the backs of your knees, so your calves rest completely on the seat. If you are less than 5'6" you might be more comfortable with one of the blocks under your sacrum (the hard bone at the back of your pelvis). If you are over 5'9", you might find a pillow or folded blanket on the chair seat more comfortable.
- It is helpful to grasp the connection between the front and back of your lower body. If your lower back is weak, it is very important to keep your abdominal muscles in good shape as they form a girdle of support and stop the weight of your abdomen pulling on the internal muscles of your lower back. Equally, the alignment, 'Up the front and down the back', will prevent gravity from making the situation worse by drawing your abdomen back into its natural resting place and lengthening your lower back. In any case, keep your thigh muscles strong – they should be taking the strain, not your lower back!

And please do remember, abdominal work is never advisable when you have your period, or if you are pregnant.

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