

# DON'T SIT UP STRAIGHT

New research shows that an upright sitting posture isn't all it's cracked up to be.

BY Alexandra Middleton



**D**on't slouch, sit up straight, stern words of warning to which I am sure we can all relate. From a young age it has been drilled into us that sitting up straight is good for your back. New research shows that this is not the case.

A study conducted by researchers in Scotland suggests that sitting up straight strains your back unnecessarily, and that ideally you should lean slightly back, at an angle of 135 degrees. Researchers used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to capture 22 participants sitting in three different positions:

- Slouching. The person hunches forward, with feet touching the floor.
- Upright. The person sits at 90 degrees, with feet touching the floor.
- Relaxed. The person reclines backwards at 135 degrees, with feet touching the floor.

**"SITTING IN SLOUCHED, AWKWARD SITTING POSTURES FOR PROLONGED PERIODS CAN INCREASE THE RISK OF DEVELOPING MUSCULOSKELETAL STRAINS AND SPRAINS."**

Measurements of spinal angles, spinal disk height and disk movement were recorded in each position. The researchers found that the upright position, at 90 degrees, caused disks to move the most,

while the relaxed position, 135 degrees, caused the least movement in disks.

Director, Work Health and Safety Consultant and osteopath at Principle Four Osteopathy, Heath Williams, agrees that sitting upright requires an individual to work harder to maintain their posture. "The longer the individual sits in this position the more likely they will drop into a more slouched sitting position," he says. "Sitting in slouched, awkward sitting postures for prolonged periods can increase the risk of developing musculoskeletal strains and sprains."

Williams' recommendation is to sit in a chair with a slight tilt off 90 degrees upright as this allows the backrest to take some of the individual's body weight and therefore enables them to sit in a position that allows for improved lumbar support. The individual should also be able to place their feet firmly on the ground or footrest.

The chair's back rest tilt angle is, however, not the only consideration. "Whilst a backrest tilt slightly off 90 degrees may reduce the load on your body and allow them to work more comfortably for prolonged periods, we would encourage individuals to be moving as often as possible during the workday." Williams says that even if a worker is sitting with the perfect posture, holding any static position for a long duration can cause issues. "The ideal work place is one that allows the worker to adopt a variety of postures," he says. "Encouraging staff to move between different work areas and perform a variety of standing and sitting tasks is the best approach." •••