



According to  
Dr. Al  
Kapandji,  
author of  
*Physiology of  
the Joints,*  
for every inch  
your head  
moves forward,  
10 lbs of extra  
strain is placed  
on your upper  
back and neck  
muscles. A  
neutral posture  
will help  
prevent the  
strain.

## Ergonomics in the Home (Part 1 of 2)

Now that you have learned the basic principles about proper body mechanics and posture (first Be Well article), let's take the principles we've learned and try to apply them to some common self care and household tasks we perform regularly at home to improve ease and safety:

### Bathing/Showering

Sitting in the bath takes far less energy than standing in the shower. Plus, bathing has the advantage of allowing you to completely relax all of your muscles. Having trouble getting in and out of the bath? Try sitting on the side of the tub and swing one leg over at a time. Use a facecloth to sit on the side of tub if slippery. Use non slip bathmats inside and outside of the tub. For those with long term or recurring problems, installing a grab bar can increase the ease and safety to getting into and out of a tub or shower.

### Grooming

Sit whenever possible to apply makeup, shave etcetera. But if you must stand, consider using an ergonomic mat or, opening the cupboard door and placing one foot on the ledge of the open cupboard under the bathroom sink. This keeps your back in a balanced position. Switch feet after a few minutes. This will relieve low back pressure. Using a standing vanity mirror on the window ledge or a hand held mirror eliminates the need to bend over the sink.



## Dusting

In order to avoid reaching and bending, position your feet to get you closer to the item you are dusting. Go down on one or both knees to dust low areas and/or use a step stool to dust high areas. A long handed duster or vacuum attachment can also be used. When dusting a collection, sit down and place items on a table.



## Sweeping/Vacuuming/Mopping

Perform this task as if the broom, mop or vacuum were attached to your body. Move your feet and legs rather than reaching or bending forward with your upper body and avoid twisting. Try sitting on a chair to sweep/vacuum/mop under a table. Go down on one knee to use a dustpan, to wring mop or to plug and unplug the vacuum.



## Washing Dishes

Store dishwashing liquid on counter where it is easily accessible. If not using a dishwasher, presoak dishes to avoid scrubbing. Place foot on bottom of cupboard shelf to relieve low back pressure. Switch feet after a few minutes. Let dishes air dry. If loading dishwasher, sit if possible and if not, bend knees or use golfers lift to load and unload.

*Sprains are one of the most common household cleaning injuries. Proper body mechanics and good posture are key in avoiding them.*

## Cleaning the Bathroom

Use a log handled cleaning device if you have one to avoid bending, reaching and awkward positioning. If not, consider climbing into the tub to clean and stepping out to rinse. Use slow circular hand movements to clean tub, counter and mirror. Sit on side of bathtub or kneel to clean toilet.

## Laundry

Perform small loads to avoid heavy lifting and break task up during the week. Sort on top of machine to avoid bending or kneel on floor to sort. Store detergent at reasonable height to avoid bending and reaching. Wet clothes are heavier and difficult to pull apart if twisted. Pull one to two items out at a time and place immediately into dryer using golfer's lift for top loading machines or drop to one knee for front loading machines. Avoid folding clothes sitting down on couch as this involves reaching and bending. Use a wheeled hamper or shopping cart to take clothes to and from laundry room in an apartment building.

## Making bed/changing sheets

Pull sheets to smooth them before getting out of bed. Once out of bed, finish straightening one side and then walk around to the other side. Only one trip around the bed is needed. When replacing linens, go down on one knee and tuck into each corner trying to avoid lifting of mattress. Complete as much as possible on one side of bed at a time. Sit on bed to place pillows in pillow cases.

## Ironing

Most ironing boards can be adjusted – sit to iron if possible. Have a chair or table nearby to stack clothes and hangers on. Remember to keep movements slow and take frequent breaks. Use the steam setting or remove times from dryer while still damp and iron.

Now that you are an expert on performing tasks at home with proper body mechanics and positioning, stay tuned for the next Be Well article to see how we can apply the same principles at work!

### Golfer's Lift

1. Firmly hold the edge of a stable surface (table or chair).
2. Straighten your back, and with one leg firmly on the ground, slowly bend at the hips downward and raise the other leg behind you to counter-weight your body.
3. Hold the object firmly with the free hand.
4. Lower your leg behind you while raising your upper body back to the start position.



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or call 477-5621  
or toll-free 1-800-565-6788*