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walking for better posture

WITH JONATHAN FITZGORDON

Gripping the glutes restricts movement and can force the pelvis out of alignment. Try to relax.

All the walking in the world won't do you any good if you're tweaking your knee, jostling your spine, or overtaxing tight muscles. Jonathan FitzGordon, a New York City yoga instructor for seven years, created the Core Walking program to help his students practice posture and alignment outside of yoga class. His approach aims to reduce wear and tear on the bones, joints, and ligaments and help the body rediscover its inherent alignment. "If you learn to walk optimally," he says, "you'll create ease in your body with every step you take." Below, FitzGordon identifies four alignment remedies for common problems.

Lift your crown

PROBLEM A jutting head or chin can throw your neck and spine out of alignment, which can cause strain.

SOLUTION Lengthen the spine and the back of your neck to bring your shoulders to the proper position; allow your spine to unfurl.

BENEFIT Helps your body find its natural alignment.

Engage the core

PROBLEM A weak core, which puts excess pressure on the disks between your vertebrae, causes compression in the spine that can result in disk degeneration over time.

SOLUTION Gently draw your navel in toward your spine to strengthen and stabilize your core muscles.

BENEFIT Toned abdominals reduce pressure on your disks, safeguarding against back injury.

Stop clenching

PROBLEM Overactive glutes work overtime—even when they don't

need to. "It's often an unconscious attempt to stabilize the body," says FitzGordon. Clenched buttocks push the thigh bones forward, constricting the hips and lower back.

SOLUTION Release the glutes as you walk. Let your hips drift back slightly, so they can sway.

BENEFIT Reduced lower back strain and reduced tension. Plus, you allow your abs to engage and stabilize the body (rather than rely on your glutes to do the work).

Shorten your stride

PROBLEM Overstriding, which causes your leg muscles to work too hard, forces the knee into hyperextension, which can degrade the joint over time.

SOLUTION Take smaller steps. "Walking should feel like gliding, not dragging," says FitzGordon.

BENEFIT Better alignment in the pelvis, spine, and rib cage; protects your knees; lets your skeleton support your body more efficiently.

Focus your energy forward and keep hips, knees, and ankles in line by taking narrow, straight steps.

