

# Self-directed support

## Postural care

People with movement problems often spend lots of time in limited positions that can distort their bodies. This can cause secondary complications and can be very painful.

Postural care is about protecting someone's body shape so they can live as healthy a life as possible.

The information here is borrowed from Postural Care's own factsheet.



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## The basic facts

Spending long periods in destructive positions causes changes in body shape.

**If we don't protect people's body shape there can be complications like:**

- contractures – you can't straighten your limbs
- loss of joint integrity – such as hip dislocation
- spinal scoliosis
- spasticity – uncontrolled muscle tone
- pain
- weakness
- poor respiratory function – difficulty in breathing
- choking
- problems with personal hygiene
- poor sleep patterns and irritability
- problems with weight bearing.

## Postural care

Postural care is therapy based on common sense and gentle principles.

If we understand how and why a person's body has changed, we can protect and sometimes restore someone's body shape.

We can protect someone's body shape simply and gently.

We can use therapeutic positioning to support the body in a neutral, symmetrical position. This can make all the difference to someone's health.

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## More information

### Training

Protecting body shape is simple but you must have thorough training to make sure you do it gently, respectfully and safely.

Using night-time positioning equipment can be dangerous if you don't do thorough safety planning.

For many people, a few rolled up towels and a teddy bear may be all you need. But other people may need more complex equipment.

For more information about training, see details about Postural Care at the end of this factsheet.

## Two examples

### Fred

At the age of three, Fred's chest was a normal shape – wider than it was deep, with the sternum in the middle. It was the right shape for all of his internal organs to work well. He could breathe easily.

By the age of ten, Fred's chest was starting to distort. His sternum wasn't in the middle anymore. It was moving to the left and his spine was being pulled to the right.

During his teenage years, Fred's body shape got much worse. The rotation of his chest continued as he grew. The space for his internal organs got smaller and the abdomen moved up into his chest. He got lots of chest infections, his right lung stopped working and he suffered terribly with trapped wind and constipation.

Fred passed away at the age of 23. His body shape was the cause of his premature death.

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## Connor

Connor used to sleep in the same position on his side and it was damaging his chest. He was having difficulty walking. Surgeons wanted to operate on his legs to try to straighten them. Connor did not want to have surgery.

Simple measurements showed Connor and his family how his chest was falling to the right. If he carried on sleeping in this position, his chest would continue rotating. This would cause scoliosis. He learned to sleep on his back with a sleep system for support. After three months, there were already big improvements.

Connor's chest became wider. The rotation at his pelvis improved – from a 20.25 degree rotation to just 3.25 degrees. His legs also became much straighter and he could walk more easily. He was discharged from the physiotherapy service. He no longer wears splints and he's off the surgical list. Three years on he's still doing really well.

Not having surgery has had a big emotional effect on Connor and his family. He has avoided the risks that come with surgery and the NHS has saved money.

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There is a lot more information  
on the In Control website:  
[www.in-control.org.uk](http://www.in-control.org.uk)

## Information about postural care

Postural Care is the organisation that knows a lot about this subject.

## Postural Care

[www.posturalcareskills.com](http://www.posturalcareskills.com)

Phone: 01827 304 938

Email: [info@posturalcareskills.com](mailto:info@posturalcareskills.com)

Thanks to Postural Care for the information in this factsheet.

<http://posturalcareskills.com/>

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## About the In Control and Me project

A three-year project to produce accessible information for everyone who wants to direct their own support, funded by the National Lottery through the BIG Lottery Fund. You can find out more at [www.mencap.org.uk/incontrol](http://www.mencap.org.uk/incontrol) or [www.in-control.org.uk/icandme](http://www.in-control.org.uk/icandme)