Call it backbone of productivity

Posture matters more than you may think.

In fact, there's evidence that whether you sit up straight or slouch affects the quality of your work.

To understand why, it's helpful to look back. Millions of years ago, if you were sitting or lying down, the chances were pretty good you were in a relatively safe spot and could let your guard down. If you were standing or moving around, though, being extra attentive might mean the difference between finding food and becoming prey.

Today our bodies still have this expectation baked in, says Max Vercruyssen, a retired ergonomist and human performance specialist who's conducted research related to posture. That means, depending on how you hold yourself, there could be huge differences in how your body operates, which could have implications for workers looking to boost their productivity.

Sit up straight

One key change that occurs when you sit up straight or stand: Your heart rate goes up about 10 beats per minute, providing a possible increase in reaction time and attention, Vercruyssen says.

He suggests adjusting your posture or standing up straight when you have a task that requires extra attention and focus. Just don't expect it to be a cure-all: Any posture-related changes to your performance are likely to be most noticeable when you're exhausted or coming out of a post-lunch slump.

"To think it's going to have a major effect when you're already optimally motivated may be a disappointment," Vercruyssen says.

Try being uncomfortable

Ergonomics is all about trade-offs. According to Vercruyssen, the more comfortable we are, the easier it is to crash, lose focus and even doze off. "Sitting on a hard chair is going to have you more activated than a comfortable chair," he says.

Vercruyssen suggests scheduling your tasks by difficulty. If you feel like you can stomach the discomfort of standing or sitting up straight for only short bursts, use this time to take on your most taxing projects. If there's something you could do in your sleep, that's a good time to get comfy.

"Still not sold on giving up your lounge chair? Vercruyssen says getting up for even a few minutes can help boost your brain and zap you out of that midafternoon slump."

Slouching makes you sad

It may not be surprising to learn that when we're feeling depressed or defeated, our bodies tend to slump. What is surprising: This effect goes both ways, and simply slouching make us feel worse for wear.

In a series of studies, Erik Peper, a professor of health education at San Francisco State University, had participants sit in various positions and then asked them to recall either negative thoughts and memories or positive and empowering ones. Slouchers had a harder time recalling the positive memories, and just 30 seconds of skipping in place markedly improved mood and energy levels.