

Posture perfect:

glide down that aisle in style

Stand up straight and you'll not only look slimmer and streamlined (it's true), but you'll feel amazing. We've found the best ways to get you walking tall

Want to lose a few kilos before your wedding, without working up a sweat? Or maybe you imagine yourself floating down the aisle looking as regal as Gwyneth on the red carpet? Your dreams can come true – all you need to do is sort out your posture.

But we're not talking about simply sucking in your stomach and throwing back your shoulders. Optimal posture is "about having maximum space between the bones of your feet on the floor, and the top of your skull," explains Helen Thurloe, who, as an Alexander Technique practitioner, helps to correct posture in others.

Chances are that on your wedding day, your posture is going to be the last thing you want to think about, which is why any problems with the way you hold yourself should be corrected before then. Thurloe believes that poor posture is a result of bad habits that accumulate over time – habits such as continually carrying a handbag on the same shoulder. Naturally, it will take time to fix them, but once better habits have been learnt, they should become second nature, so you'll always look perfectly poised.

"People who have that poise are very attractive and you want to look at them," Thurloe points out. And as for the pain-free weight loss we promised? Think optical illusion: "If you've got the same volume of body and you're squashing it from the top down, it's going to poke out in more places than if it's lengthening nicely." It makes sense.

So forget the crash diet – try one of these techniques and you'll cruise down that aisle looking slender and bursting with big-day confidence.

1 Pilates

This series of exercises, devised by Joseph Pilates in the early 1900s, is well known for the way it sculpts lean and toned bodies. Its five basic principles – breathing and the placement of pelvis, ribcage, shoulders, head and neck – also help to align the body symmetrically, which translates into better posture.

Rachel Crompton, a STOTT Pilates teacher, explains, "STOTT training is leading the world in Pilates. It's [Joseph] Pilates' exercises but with a more contemporary approach." After a series of Pilates classes, Crompton says your body should "automatically hit [the right position], and your shoulders and head will know exactly where they should be."

While some people will notice a change in their bodies after about 10 classes, Crompton also recommends three or four individual sessions, followed by three to six months of further classes, to really see benefits.

To locate a Pilates studio near you, visit the Pilates Institute of Australasia's website at www.pilates.net.

2 Alexander Technique

An Australian actor, F.M. Alexander, originally devised this technique a century ago to help correct problems with his voice. Refining it over many years, he discovered that it actually helped to coordinate his entire body. It's been popular with actors ever since, and is even taught at drama schools such as NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art).

Thurloe explains that Alexander therapists are trained to recognise patterns in the way that we walk, sit, hold shopping bags and carry out other everyday movements. This might be the way you tilt to one side when you walk, or grip a computer mouse rather than resting your hand on it. Once these habits have been identified, the practitioner can teach a student how to do these tasks more efficiently.

Thurloe recommends an initial series of five one-on-one sessions and then, "depending on what your raw material was like, you'd decide whether you wanted to do more."

To find a certified Alexander teacher visit www.alexandertechnique.org.au.

THE WALL CRAWL

Haven't got time for weekly classes? You can still get great results at home – all you need is a wall. The Wall Crawl is a nifty technique devised by Alex Travers, etiquette consultant and director of A Matter of Style. Start by standing with your head, shoulders and back flat against a wall, feet forward and slightly apart. Holding your back in a steady position, walk your feet back until they reach the wall – to get your body into the right alignment. Keeping the same position, slowly walk away. Practise the technique until it becomes second nature and you'll soon be perfectly poised. Top tip: keep your chin up and look straight ahead.



3 Rolfling

Developed by Dr Ida Rolf during the mid-20th century, Rolfling uses a combination of soft tissue work and re-education to help realign the body. Practitioner John Smith explains that although the technique works with the soft tissue, it's different to traditional massage.

"We use quite a lot of force and it's very slow, so we work into the tissue and then we get people to make specific movements that help us.

"For example, if we're trying to open up an area around the side of the ribs, we'll have the client lying down – we'll work into that tissue and get them stretching or reaching through that line. This makes the work more effective and gives a longer-lasting result."

Because of the force used, Rolfling has a reputation for being painful, but Smith claims this is not true. "It's probably less painful than a shiatsu session," he explains.

Smith recommends a total of 10 sessions – one each week or fortnight – to really reap the benefits of Rolfling. Each session focuses on a specific theme such as breathing or the correct placement of the head.

To chart students' progress, many Rolfling practitioners (or 'Rolfers' as they're known) take before-and-after photos at each session, and use special imaging software to run through the pictures in sequence. "You see people – like one of those slow-motion photos – sort of opening like a flower and slowly getting taller," says Smith.

Rolfers must complete rigorous training which, until recently, could only be done in the US or Europe. The Australian Rolfling Association's website (www.rolfling.org.au) has a list of registered practitioners. **Michelle Bateman** 

Jane wondered how she could wear her veil while balancing a book on her head.