

Replacing chairs: stools

Stools offer a middle ground between right-angle sitting and other postures like perching, standing, or squatting that make more active use of the whole body.

They could be introduced into contemporary life as a compromise for those who are not ready for a seating revolution, but who are still interested in either social or physical improvement. Sitting without a backrest promotes autonomous seating, thereby rebuilding torso strength.

Stability is created by forming a tripod between pivot and feet, allowing the seat to move in any direction the user wishes. In a similar spirit -but with a very different look- some somatic practitioners have started to advocate using large inflated balls as seats. Sitting on relatively unstable surface requires the person to use the legs and torso actively and to use slightly different muscles continuously, which overcomes some of the circulation and muscle fatigue problems associated with sedentary work, and has the additional benefit of keeping the mind alert. Such a "stool" no longer conforms to conventional chair seat height, but rather approaches the height of a perch, halfway between sitting and standing.

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*From The chair: rethinking culture, body and design
(WW Norton: New York and London, 2000)*

Mini-Exercise:

experiencing the difference between Right-Angled seating and Perching

- Place a conventional chair or stool (17-18 in. high) next to a 24-in. stool.
- Sit on the chair with your feet on the floor and pay attention to your lower back, noting the amount of muscular effort required to sit upright.
- Move to the higher seat, sit at its edge with your feet on the floor, and again tune in to your lower back, noting the amount of effort needed to sit upright.
- Did you notice a difference between the two? You might want to move back and forth between the two seats once again. You may notice that sitting up straight on the higher stool requires less effort.