

Stretching for the Workplace

If you sit at a desk all day, you may want extra time for your neck and shoulders when you get a massage. It may also help to take short breaks at work to relieve tension and prevent injury. Stretch frequently, flexing tight joints and shaking out tense limbs. Here are six stretches you can do at your desk.

- For neck tension, let your head fall forward as you exhale. Inhale and very slowly roll your head to the right until your right ear is resting over your right shoulder. Exhale and roll your head to your chest. Inhale and roll your head to your left shoulder. Exhale and return to the chest. Continue these movements, slowly and easily, for one to five minutes.

Important: never roll your head behind your shoulder.

- To stretch your whole spine, raise your arms over your head. Stretch your right arm toward the ceiling, hold and relax. Then repeat with your left arm. Breathe slowly, exhaling completely as you stretch. Repeat several times. If you have high blood pressure, skip this one.

- For joint mobility, sit on a chair and stretch one leg in front of you. Roll your ankle in circles, both directions. Repeat on the other side. Then, with your arms at your sides, roll your wrists one way, then the other.

- As if you had a piece of tape stuck to your fingers, shake your arms and hands vigorously to get it off. Shake for 30 seconds and feel the energy move through your limbs.

- For tension in your upper back, clasp your hands behind your head and stretch your elbows back. Exhale and very slowly twist your head and torso to the right. Hold for a moment, inhale and turn back to center. Then exhale, turn to the left, and return to center. Repeat 5 times each direction.

- To ease back tension, push your chair away from the desk. Stretch both arms forward and rest your hands on the desk. Exhale and lower your head while arching your back. Relax for a moment with your head down, then inhale and raise your head and chest, curving your back in the other direction. Stretch several times this way, breathing slowly and completely.

Hints for Stretching

- Stretch to a place you feel pull, but not pain. Don't bounce.

- Hold the stretch for 10 seconds to increase circulation, 30-60 seconds to lengthen a muscle.

- Breathe easily while holding the stretch. Slow, full breaths can get more oxygen to your muscles and help prevent straining.

- If you have a recent injury or surgery, or if you feel a sharp pain when stretching, consult your primary health practitioner before continuing a stretching program.