

Stretching Exercises at Your Desk: 12 Simple Tips

Try these stretching exercises at your desk or anywhere else to ease back pain and boost energy.

1. **Just stand up and sit down -- no hands**

- You might have gotten a gold star in preschool for sitting still, but it just goes to show you (best sellers notwithstanding) that not all of us learned everything we need to know in kindergarten. "If you stand up and sit down (over and over) -- without using your hands -- it can be a challenge," says Smith. "Do it while you're on the phone; no one will know."

2. **Substitute exercise for sitting -- while you work**

- Get rid of your desk chair and substitute an exercise ball, suggests Smith. "I used it for a while when I was having low-back problems; it was great," Smith says. "All day you are engaging all the muscles in the back, legs, butt, everything, to stay balanced."
- Hame knows one man who put a treadmill in his office and conducted all his business while walking. (He lost weight, too, Hame says.)

3. **Shrug your shoulders -- to release the neck and shoulders**

- Inhale deeply and shrug your shoulders, lifting them high up to your ears. Hold. Release and drop. Repeat three times.
- Shake your head slowly, yes and no. You might as well amuse yourself while you do it to relax even further. Ask yourself silly questions: "Is your boss an idiot?" Move your head up and down, "Yes, yes, yes." Side to side: "No. No. No." (Shedding tension is as much mental as physical.)

4. **Loosen the hands with air circles**

- Clench both fists, stretching both hands out in front of you.
- Make circles in the air, first in one direction, to the count of ten.
- Then reverse the circles.
- Shake out the hands.

5. **Point your fingers -- good for hands, wrist, and forearms**

- Stretch your left hand out in front of you, pointing fingers toward the floor. Use your right hand to increase the stretch, pushing your fingers down and toward the body. Be gentle.
- Do the same with the other hand.
- Now stretch your left hand out straight in front, wrist bent, with fingers pointing skyward. Use your right hand to increase the stretch, pulling the fingers back toward your body.
- Do the same on the other side.

6. **Release the upper body with a torso twist**

- Inhale and as you exhale, turn to the right and grab the back of your chair with your right hand, and grab the arm of the chair with your left.
- With eyes level, use your grasp on the chair to help twist your torso around as far to the back of the room as possible. Hold the twist and let your eyes continue the stretch -- see how far around the room you can peer.
- Slowly come back to facing forward.
- Repeat on the other side.

7. **Do leg extensions -- work the abs and legs**

- Grab the seat of your chair to brace yourself and extend your legs straight out in front of you so they are parallel to the floor.
- Flex and point your toes five times. Release.
- Repeat.

8. **Stretch your back with a "big hug"**

- Hug your body, placing the right hand on your left shoulder and the left hand on your right shoulder.
- Breathe in and out, releasing the area between your shoulder blades.
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9. Cross your arms -- for the shoulders and upper back

- Extend one arm out straight in front of you. With the other hand, grab the elbow of the outstretched arm and pull it across your chest, stretching your shoulder and upper back muscles.
- Hold. Release.
- Stretch out the other arm in front of you -- repeat.

10. Stretch your back and shoulders with a "leg hug"

- Sit on the edge of your chair (if it has wheels, wedge the chair against the desk or wall to make sure it does not roll). Put your feet together, flat on the floor.
- Lean over, chest to knees, letting your arms dangle loosely to the floor. Release your neck.
- Now bring your hands behind your legs, right hand grasping left wrist, forearm (or elbow if you can reach that far), and left hand grasping the right. Feel the stretch in your back, shoulders and neck. Hold.
- Release your hands to the floor again.
- Repeat three times or as often as it feels good.

11. Look up to release upper body

- Sit up tall in your chair, or stand up. Stretch your arms overhead and interlock your fingers.
- Turn the palms to the ceiling as you lift your chin up, tilt your head back and gaze up at the ceiling, too.
- Inhale, exhale, release.

12. Substitute walks for email -- and don't eat at your desk

- Instead of emailing a colleague "and copying 25 people who don't want to be copied anyway," Smith says, "walk over to the colleague you really want to talk to."

Instead of a lunch meeting at your desk, walk together to a neighborhood sandwich shop. "Talk while you walk -- it's more efficient and productive," Smith says. "You're getting more oxygen to the brain, you have no distractions, and you're more likely to remember what is said."