



Stretch to Relieve Stress at Your Desk

For many of us who work in an office, sitting at a desk all day has become part of our normal routine. And while we might be used to general inactivity during our work days, it may not exactly be good for the body. Sitting at a computer can bring on backaches due to poor posture and eye strain from staring at the screen, among other effects.

Most jobs these days involve sitting at a desk or computer for a good portion of your day, but that doesn't have to mean you can't stay healthy, alert and limber. If you are one of the many who find yourself sitting at a computer most of the day, here are some simple steps you can follow to improve your posture, keep your health in check and relieve tension in your body.

1. Like mother always said... sit up straight, don't hunch over in your chair.

- Keep your back straight and your shoulders back.
- Don't let your wrists sit on the keyboard or a mouse pad (unless you have a wrist rest).
- Your monitor should be level with your eyes. If you have to look down or up, adjust the height of your screen.
- Keep your legs bent at the knees and your feet flat on the floor#

2. Stand up every 30 minutes to walk around.

While your work might be contained to your desk, you don't have to be! Get up and walk around – even for 5 minutes – to help ensure continuous blood circulation in your arms and legs and keep them from getting too stressed or tense. If you're able to take longer breaks, take a short walk outside your building or down to the first floor by way of the stairs.

3. Stretch those muscles!

Just because you're sitting doesn't mean you should skip stretching. While sitting all day, your muscles become tense, which can make your whole body feel stiff. Here are some tips for relieving tension in various muscles.

- **Neck:** Slowly flex your head forward/backward, side to side and look right and left. It's important not to roll your head around your neck (in a full circle). This could cause damage to the joints of the neck.
- **Arms and Shoulders:** Start by rolling your shoulders forward 10 times, then backward 10 times. Next, brace your hands on the edge of your desk – the same width apart as your shoulders. Turn your hands in so they point toward each other and lean forward, hunching your shoulders. Take this a step further and push your shoulders and elbows closer to the desk.
- **Wrists and Ankles:** Roll your wrists every hour or so – 10 times clockwise, then 10 times counterclockwise. This helps prevent Carpal Tunnel Syndrome if you type a lot. The same exercise works for your ankles. Roll them in a clockwise motion 3 times, then counterclockwise. This helps improve blood circulation and prevents the tingling feeling you might get when blood circulation is cut off.
- **Chest:** Do you hunch over your keyboard? If so, try this exercise: open your arms wide as if you are going to hug someone, rotate your wrists externally (thumbs going up and back) and pull your shoulders back. This stretch opens your chest up (it's the opposite of being hunched), and you should feel a good stretch across your upper chest.
- **Abdomen:** Contract your abdominal and gluteal muscles, hold them for a few seconds, then release. Repeat this every few minutes, all day long, while you are working at your desk.
- **Calves:** While sitting, lift up your legs on the balls of your feet, contract your leg muscles, and then set them down. Repeat 15 – 20 times, or until your legs are comfortably tired. Repeat the sequence again in 10 minutes. Continue this routine for 30 minutes, up to an hour. This stretch helps prevent blood clots from developing in your legs.

4. Take a few deep breaths.

To work your abdominal muscles, hold your stomach for a few seconds when breathing in, then release when breathing out.

5. Keep a water bottle at your desk.

Make a habit of drinking water at least every 30 minutes. If you do this regularly, you will begin to feel more alert. When you're out of water, take trips to refill your bottle or glass, so you can also walk around and exercise your legs at the same time.

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• **Ready to take it to the next level?** •
• These tips give you a great start for •
• stretching out and relieving stress. But •
• don't stop there! Talk to a personal •
• Health Coach who can help you create •
• a plan to identify how to fit exercise into •
• your day! To learn more about Health •
• Coaching, visit iLiveLifeWell.com or call •
• Healthways at (877) 292-1373. •
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