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## 5 Workday Stretches That Relax Your Mind and Body

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Tired? Stiff? Perhaps you're finding your work environment stale and stressful? If so, it may be time for a simple, yet effective, stretch break. Workday stretches not only lengthen the soft tissue, but also allow the body to recharge from worries. Stretching also alleviates stress-related tensions such as a clenched jaw and shrugged shoulders.

Importantly, stretching allows us to reconnect to our breath. Deep breathing combined with stretching activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes relaxation and relieves the "fight or flight" stress response. In addition, chronic sitting promotes poor posture, which may eventually cause your soft tissues to adapt to the traditional "desk jockey" posture—a forward head tilt, rounded spine and internally rotated shoulders.

The following stretches, which are easy to implement from the comfort of your office, even if you're wearing workday attire, target the desk-sitting muscles that greatly need lengthening throughout the day.

### Side Neck Stretch



This stretch relieves jaw tension and allows the side of the neck, front of the deltoid and part of the chest muscle to open and lengthen.

**How to Perform:** Slowly tilt your left ear toward the shoulder. Place the top of your right hand on the lower part of the back, and roll the right shoulder down and away from the ear. Place your left hand with slight pressure on the top of the head. Slightly lift the chin and keep the jaw open. Hold for five deep breaths, release, and repeat on the opposite side.

### **Seated Lateral Flexion**



This stretch expands the chest muscles while lengthening the latissimus dorsi and serratus anterior muscles.

**How to Perform:** Sit upright with feet firmly planted on the ground. Keep the spine neutral and place hands interlocked behind the head. Hold and allow the chest to open for three breaths while the elbows open to the side. Exhale; laterally flex the spine on the left side (imagine the left side of the rib cage moves closer to the hip bone). Hold for five deep breaths, return to center and repeat on the opposite side.

### **Seated Spinal Twist**



This stretch lengthens the spinal extensor muscles to alleviate poor posture and chronic back pain.

**How to Perform:** Sit upright with feet flat on the floor. Cross your right leg over the left (if this is too deep, keep feet on the floor). Inhale, lift arms overhead and exhale rotate to your right and place hands on the outside of your chair or thigh. Hold for five breaths. Inhale, rotate to center, switch crossed legs and exhale and complete the stretch on the left.

### **Seated Figure Four Stretch**



This stretch opens the glutes and the external rotators of the hip.

**How to Perform:** Sit upright with a neutral spine. Cross your right leg over the left and rest your hands on your shins. For a deeper stretch, lean your torso slightly forward.

Hold for five deep breaths, release and repeat on the left leg.

### **Desk Downward Facing Dog**



This stretch lengthens the chest and back of the legs (glutes, hamstrings and calves).

**How to Perform:** Stand upright and walk your feet slightly in front of the hips. Hinge at your hips and place your hands on your desk, chair or door handle. Push the hips back as you bring the chest parallel to the floor. Hold for five deep breaths.



**By Elizabeth Kovar**

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