

Exercising Common Sense

By Nancy M. Lowe, MPT, CHT, CAE

In addition to the 20-plus minutes of regular aerobic exercise recommended by medical and fitness experts, it makes sense to do brief but specific exercises frequently throughout your day. When I talk to folks about the importance of mini-breaks for health, comfort and productivity, one of the most common questions is, "What exercises should I do?" The choices are endless, but here are five favorites to help you get started.

Select one or two stretches to do about once an hour, or more often if you wish. Just be sure to avoid any exercise that causes pain or other disturbing symptoms, and get the go-ahead from your doctor or other medical professional before beginning any new exercise.

Start each stretch by sitting or standing with good posture, chin slightly tucked. Inhale and exhale fully. Repeat each exercise three to five times.



- 1. Neck stretches** can combat the stiffness associated with working in static positions while looking at documents, tools or computer monitor. Hold each stretch for three to five seconds if comfortable.
 - a. Gently tip your head to one side, then the other, moving the ear slowly toward the shoulder.
 - b. Tip your head forward, dropping your chin toward your chest.

- 2. Seated leg stretch:** This stretch can improve leg and ankle mobility as well as circulation to the lower extremities. While sitting with good posture, straighten one leg out in front of you. Circle the ankle three times slowly in one direction, then the other. Return your foot to the floor. Repeat the exercise with the other leg.



3. Fly stretches:

Fly stretches improve breathing, shoulder mobility, and circulation to the arms and hands. During this exercise, keep your head upright without jutting forward. Hold each position for three to five seconds if comfortable.



- a. Hold your hands in front of your face, palms facing you and elbows touching.
- b. Next, roll your palms outward as you move your arms to the side and stretch your elbows back.

3. Backward Shoulder Circles can help ease shoulder discomfort caused by working in a forward posture. Shrug



the shoulders gently upward, then slowly move them back and then down. Let the shoulders drop to a resting position briefly before repeating the exercise. Make sure your head remains upright and does not jut forward during the exercise.

4. Standing back extension. This exercise can be used to prevent or ease back stiffness associated with prolonged



sitting or bending. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart. Place your hands on your lower back for support. Stretch your trunk upward, then gently backwards to your comfort. Keep your eyes facing forward or slightly upward. Repeat slowly without holding.

Use exercises like these along with safe work practices, good posture, appropriate equipment and efficient workstation arrangement to help keep yourself mobile and healthy in your home and office environments.

Nancy M. Lowe is a Certified Ergonomist, Registered Physical Therapist and Certified Hand Therapist with over 20 years of experience treating and preventing injuries. For more ergonomics information visit <http://www.pacificcoastergo.com>

Copyright 2009 Nancy Lowe / Pacific Coast Ergonomics