

# Desk Stretching for All Ages

**Due to recent events, many of us have had to change the way we work and go to school. Here are some great stretches that are quick and easy to do at home and at your desk! Please take a look at our video for demonstrations of each stretch!**

## Neck stretches<sup>1</sup>:

In today's world of virtual learning and working, we find ourselves hunched over our computers more often than ever. Unfortunately, this can result in neck pain and soreness due to things like poor posture and improper screen angles. Although the ultimate goal should be to correct what's causing our pain, here are a few neck stretches that you can do while sitting at your desk to give you some relief:

### 1. Upper trapezius stretch

Sit up tall with good posture (straight spine, chin neutral, eyes facing forward, shoulders relaxed and down) and grasp the bottom of your seat with your left hand. Slightly lower your right ear towards your shoulder until a **gentle** stretch is felt on the left side of your neck in your upper trapezius. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds. Repeat this same process on the other side by grabbing the seat with your right hand, lowering your left ear towards your shoulder, and holding for 30 seconds. Do this stretch 3 times on both sides twice a day.

The muscle this stretches, your upper trapezius, plays a big role in elevating your scapula. In other words, it's the muscle that you use when you shrug! This can get tight from having constantly shrugged shoulders while sitting in front of the computer.

### 2. Levator scapulae stretch

Sit up tall with good posture (straight spine, chin neutral, eyes facing forward, shoulders relaxed and down) and grasp the bottom of your seat with your left hand. This time, turn your chin towards your right **armpit** until you feel a **gentle** stretch on the side of your neck in your levator scapula. Hold this stretch for 30 seconds. Repeat this same process on the other side by grasping the seat with your right hand and turning your chin towards your left armpit until a comfortable stretch is felt. Do this stretch 3 times on each side, twice a day.

The muscle this stretches, your levator scapulae, also acts as an elevator of your scapula. Like with our upper trapezius, this muscle can get tight during times where our shoulders are shrugged for too long. Also, these muscles can get tight when we're stressed, so don't forget to loosen up those shoulders while you're reading this!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mayfieldclinic.com/pe-neckex.htm>

## Lumbar Stretches<sup>2</sup>:

Lower back pain can be a problem for most of us. Lower back pain is usually felt in the lumbar region of the spine. With work from home and online classes it can be hard to find time to stretch your lumbar as you sit through meeting after meeting. Here are a couple stretches that you can do.

The first stretch targets the lumbar extensor muscles in your back. The extensor muscles of the back help support the spine and allow for backward bending motion. The MVPs for your lumbar extensors are the erector spinae and multifidus muscles. The erector spinae are a group of back muscles that consist of the iliocostalis, longissimus, and the spinalis. A fun way to remember them is to use the mnemonic I Love Spaghetti!

1. Lumbar Extension while Standing:
  - Place your hands on the small of your back for support and stand with your feet apart and toes pointing forward.
  - Bend your head, neck, and back backwards while allowing your hips to shift forward slightly. Use your hands on the small of your back for support as you bend backward.
  - Repeat this stretch 5 to 7 times and each time slightly increase the back extension.

The next stretch targets the quadratus lumborum which is a deep abdominal muscle found in the lower back. This muscle is important for proper posture as it helps to stabilize the spine.

2. Quadratus Lumborum Stretch while Standing
  - Place your right hand on your hip and stretch your left arm overhead to the right side of your body
  - Use your right hand on your hip to gently push your hip to the left side and at the same time side bend your trunk to the right side
  - Hold this stretch for 15-30s and repeat 3 times
  - Repeat on the opposite side

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<sup>2</sup> DeStefano LA. *Greenman's Principles of Manual Medicine*. Philadelphia PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2011

## Shoulder and Chest Stretches<sup>3</sup>:

1. **Shoulder stretch:** This stretch is great for targeting all of the muscles that form the back part of the shoulder: the trapezius, the back part of the deltoid, teres major, teres minor, infraspinatus and even part of the latissimus dorsi. All of these muscles help keep your shoulder stabilized and can get tight after sitting at a desk for long periods of time. **Use with caution and ask your doctor if you have a prior shoulder injury or instability.**

With your right hand, grab your left elbow and lift it across your chest. As you do this, keep your body as straight as possible. Bring your elbow as close to your chest as you can, feeling light tension across the back of your shoulder. Don't pull too hard. Hold stretch for 30 seconds. Repeat the stretch with the other arm. This stretch can be done in a seated or standing position.

2. **Chest stretch:** This stretch is great for opening up the chest to aid in good posture. The major chest muscles targeted in this stretch are pectoralis major and pectoralis minor.

Place both hands behind your head. Without putting too much pressure on the back of your head, bring your elbows as far back as you can while squeezing your shoulder blades together. Make sure not to shrug your shoulders up to your ears, keep the shoulders down and relaxed as much as possible. You should feel a good stretch across your chest. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds. Slowly bring your hands down to a resting position. Repeat the stretch.

## Oblique Stretches<sup>4</sup>:

This stretch should be done in a seated position. **IMPORTANT:** This stretch should not be painful!

- Raise both arms above your head.
- Clasp your two hands together. (The clasped hands should be pointing at the ceiling)
- Side bend to the right. (The clasped hands should now be pointing to the right wall)
- Hold this position for 10 seconds.
- Repeat steps 3 and 4 on the left side.

Helpful tip: To deepen the stretch when side bent, take a deep breath in.

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<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/stretching/sls-20076525?s=3>

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<https://eds-b-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.rvu.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=07e7a2f2-95ea-498c-99f8-56fecc95ea49%40pdc-v-sessmgr06>

Harvard Men's Health Watch. July 2020; Vol. 24 (12).

## **Hamstring Stretches<sup>5</sup>:**

Now more than ever, many of us are sitting in chairs for extended periods of time, whether we are at school, work, or at home. This can lead to having tight hamstring muscles. These are the muscles on the backside of your thigh. There are three main muscles that make up the hamstrings: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, and semimembranosus. Here are two stretches that can help loosen up those hamstrings!

The first stretch is a simple one you can do without getting out of your chair! It's important to know that you do NOT want the stretch to be painful. Just go to the point where you feel a nice stretch. It's ok if at first, you can't go that far. You will improve as you continually do these stretches.

### **Seated hamstring stretch**

To stretch the hamstrings while sitting, follow these steps:

- Sit on the edge of a chair, straighten one leg in front of the body with the heel on the floor.
- Straighten the spine by sitting tall and rolling the pelvis forward.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds. You should feel the stretch on the back of your thigh, you may also feel it in your calf, which is ok.
- Switch legs and do it again!

Repeat 1 to 2 times for each leg. Aim to perform this exercise twice daily.

In the second stretch, we are going to stand up and use the chair to help us. Again, these stretches should not be painful, we just want a good stretch.

### **Hamstring stretch on the edge of a chair**

For this stretch, stand up facing the chair and:

- Place one foot on the seat of the chair while the other leg is placed down with the foot resting on the floor.
- Bend forward at the hip, keeping the spine straight. You can hold on to something near you to help you keep your balance.
- Try to keep the foot as straight as possible without pain.
- Hold this stretch for 30 seconds.
- Switch legs and do it again!

Repeat 1 to 2 times for each leg. Aim to perform this exercise twice daily.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.spine-health.com/wellness/exercise/easy-hamstring-stretches>

## Trapezius Stretches<sup>6</sup>:

Spending the day seated in front of a computer, we tend to take posture that is more slouched with the head positioned forward to the shoulders. This increases the strain on our trapezius muscles and slowly resets their normal tone causing neck and upper back tightness and pain. But taking a few minutes several times a day can help reset the tone of your trapezius muscles reducing pain and helping to maintain better posture.

The below exercises will help bring your trapezius muscles into a physiological state where the tone can be reset with the neck stretches described previously.

Y

- While seated raise both arms above your head and bring them out a little to make a Y shape. Then pinch your shoulder blade together and hold them there for 15-20 second. Once finished relax the shoulder blades and bring your arms down.

T

- Next stretch your arms out and bring them level with your shoulders to make a T shape. Then pinch the shoulder blade together again for 15-20 sec. Once finished, relax your shoulder blades and bring your arms to your sides.

W

- Lastly, bring your hands up so they are level with your shoulders while maintaining a bend at the elbows to create a W shape with your arms. Then pinch the shoulders together for 15-20 sec. Once finished, relax your shoulder blades and return your arms to your sides.

Afterwards your neck and upper back should feel looser. Adding a few neck stretches will help to further reset the tone and correct posture.

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<sup>6</sup> RVUCOM. *RVUCOM Osteopathic Principles and Practices: 2020-2012 OPP I and II Manuale*. Parker CO: 2020

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