

Office based stretches – why do them?

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In the sporting context, stretches have long been an integral part of injury prevention. Increasingly in the industrial setting, warm up and cool down stretches have been incorporated into the shifts of process workers with the same intention. But how relevant are stretches for those of us performing more sedentary type work?

Sitting at a computer workstation, sustaining the same posture for prolonged periods, repetitively performing keying and mousing actions – we are loading our bodies just as much as someone performing a function on a process line. Stretches are therefore just as important in injury prevention in the office setting as in a factory.

Many of the joints in our body have synovial fluid which lubricates the joint surfaces and provides nutrition to the area. Synovial fluid is distributed through the joint with movement. When we do not alter our position for a period of time, it diminishes the lubrication of the joints. How often have your joints felt stiff after sitting through a long meeting? Stretches, by placing various joints through a range of movement, help distribute the synovial fluid within the joint and keep it well lubricated and nourished.

At a physiological level, when a muscle or any body structure is stretched, blood flow to the area increases. This is beneficial as oxygenated blood is vital for metabolic processes and hence the provision of energy. An increase in blood flow also reduces the accumulation of lactic acid. Lactic acid accumulation is one of the primary factors that lead to muscle fatigue. The less fatigued a muscle group is, the less likelihood for injury.

At a macro level, stretches performed consistently over a period of time can re-align the collagen fibres in our soft tissue structures, such as tendons and ligaments. This contributes to our flexibility which is a component of our overall fitness. Fitness can determine an individual's predisposition in developing injuries and can often impact on injury recovery time.

The following office based stretches target areas of the body most commonly under stress from seated computer based work.

Before you get started

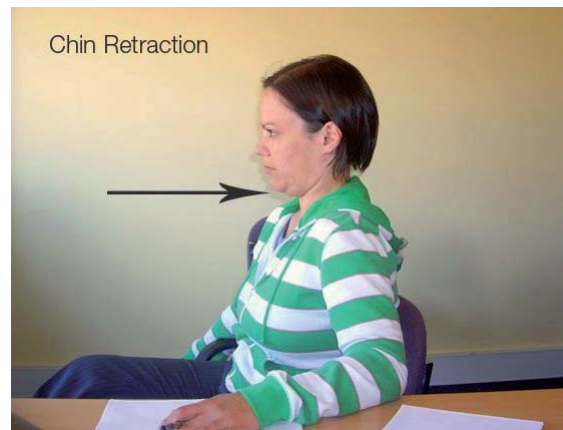
- If you are currently under the care of a health care professional for any injury / condition, please consult them before commencing these stretches.
- Performing one stretch and holding it merely for a few seconds is better than doing no stretches at all. So fit these stretches in wherever you can eg whilst you are on the phone, reading an email, standing at the photocopier, waiting for a fax, in the tearoom, etc.
- Try to avoid prolonged sitting and attempt to change your posture every 20 minutes. Stretches for the lower limb has not been included as getting up and going for a walk even if it is around the office has all the benefits of mobilisation as well as stretching.
- Always stretch within your comfort limits. Do not push into pain.
- Avoid ballistic and bouncy movements when stretching.
- Don't forget to breathe! Try to avoid holding your breath when stretching.

Chin tucks

You should feel the stretch in the back of your neck.

Tuck your chin in to give yourself a double chin. Hold for several seconds.

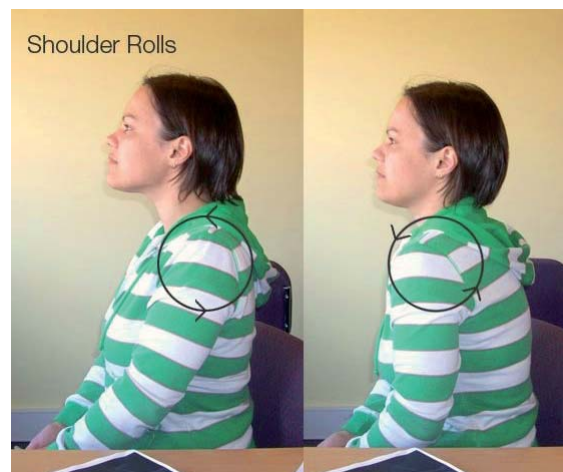
For more of a stretch, tuck your chin in and drop your chin to your chest.



Shoulder rolls

You should feel the stretch at the front and back of your shoulders.

Draw large circles several times, clockwise then anti-clockwise.

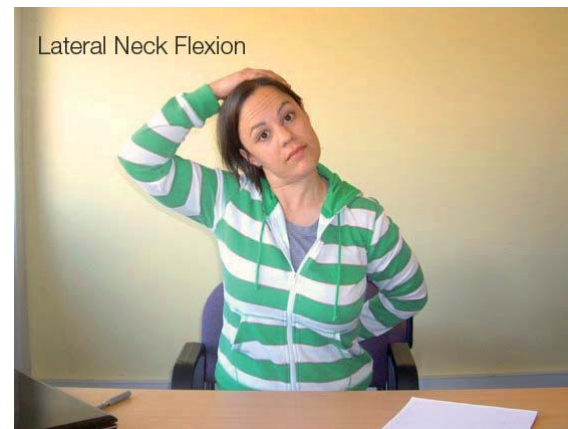


Lateral neck flexion

You should feel the stretch at the side of your neck.

Facing forward, drop one ear to your shoulder and hold for several seconds.

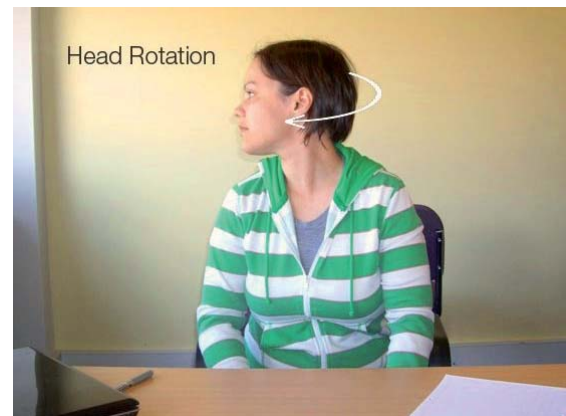
For more of a stretch, use your hand to gently guide your ear further towards your shoulder and place your other hand behind your back. Repeat on other side.



Head rotation

You should feel the stretch at the side of your neck.

Making sure your shoulders are facing forward, turn your head to look over one shoulder. Repeat on other side.



Wrist extensor stretch

You should feel the stretch at the top side of your forearm and wrist

With your elbow straight, bend your wrist so that your fingers are pointing down and use your other hand to pull the hand towards you. Hold for several seconds. Repeat on other side.



Wrist flexor stretch

You should feel the stretch under side of your forearm and wrist.

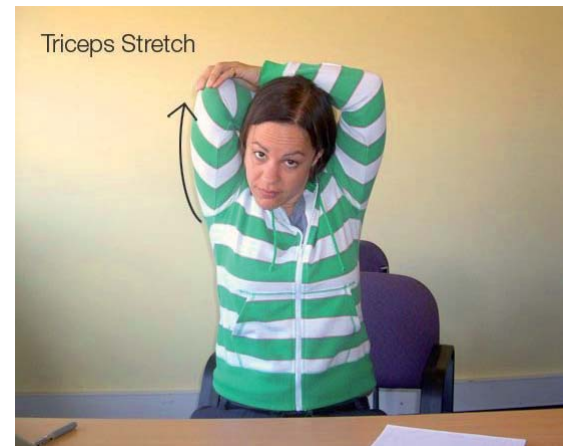
With your elbow straight, bend your wrist so that your fingers are pointing upwards. Use your other hand to pull the one being stretched towards you. Hold for several seconds. Repeat on other hand.



Triceps stretch

You should feel the stretch at the back of your upper arms.

Bend your arm at the elbow and raise your elbow towards the ceiling. Use your other arm to pull your elbow back.



Lumbar stretch

You should feel the stretch in the small of your back.

Standing up with feet planted and hands on your hips, lean back on your hips.

