

How to Relieve Stress by Stretching

Nowadays, it's hard to get around without encountering modern-day conveniences. And with modernism comes a lifestyle characterized by a very rapid rate of change. With this, most people have been living stressfully by trying to cope with the demands of the fast pace that life is going at.

I guess it would be alright to say that stress is already a given in your daily life. You encounter stress at work, at home, in your relationships and, sometimes, even during your usual leisurely activity. Although some would think that stress is just a mental or emotional state that one has to go through, it is also equally a physical state. Since different people live life differently, it can be expected that the manner by which a person responds to stress will also vary. However, stretching, in all its forms, remains to be the simplest and most effective method that can be employed to relieve stress. Here are some recommended stretching exercises that you can use to untie the knots in your muscles that have formed due to stress.

- 1. Neck Stretches:** Simple Neck Stretch. Sit up straight and keep your feet firmly planted on the ground. Place your right hand under your right thigh or hold the right side of the seat of your chair to secure your position. Then, lift your left arm over your head and gently place your hand on the right side of your head. Slowly bend your head towards the left side and hold this position for about 10-15 counts. Do the same for the other side. Neck Rolls. With your back straight (but in a relaxed state), bend your head forward. Slowly roll it to the right then let it drop back to its original position. Do the same to the left.



- 2. Shoulder Stretches:** Shoulder Shrugs. Begin with a simple gesture of shrugging your shoulders repeatedly to get the blood to start flowing to your shoulders and neck area. Hold your shoulders up for a couple of seconds then slowly roll them back. Shoulder Stretch. Place your inner right wrist on the area just above your left elbow to keep your left hand across your chest. Gently apply pressure for about 15 counts. Do the same for the other side.



- 3. Yoga:** Although yoga involves a lot of stretching and holding certain poses, it also teaches practitioners how to be calm, how to stay focused, how to balance and how to relax oneself. Here are a couple of yoga stretches that help relieve stress:
Upward Facing Dog. Lie down with your tummy on the floor. Slowly lift your head and upper torso up until your body weight is resting on your hands and on your toes. To maximize the stretch, draw your head back and lift your chin a bit higher while arching your back just a bit more.



Downward Facing Dog. Get down on the floor on your hands and knees. Make sure that your waist is at a 90-degree angle with your thighs. Upon exhaling, slowly lift your knees off the ground until you've formed an inverted "V" position with your body. It is recommended to hold this pose for about 1-3 minutes before returning to your original position with an exhale.



4. **Back stretches:** **Child's Pose.** This stretches the lower back. You start by kneeling on the floor with the knees about hip-width apart and sitting on your heels. Then you bring your upper torso forward and down until you assume the worship position. Your hands can either be outstretched in front of you or at your sides. **Seated Spine Twist.** Sit on a chair with a back rest (no chairs on wheels). Cross your left leg over your right leg then hold the right arm or the right side of the backrest of the chair. Slowly pull your upper torso around, slightly twisting your body at the waist. Hold this position for about 8-10 seconds. Do the same on the other side. **Waterfall Stretch.** Stand firm with your legs apart, slightly wider than your shoulder width. Start reaching down then keep your arms parallel and hold them together over your head. Pull yourself down using your arms.



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5. **Leg and feet stretches:** These are very simple stretches that you can do anywhere. **Lunges.** Stand straight with your feet slightly apart. Put one foot forward and slowly bend your knee on this foot, placing your full body weight on this foot while keeping the toes of the other foot connected to the ground. Hold this position for about 15 counts then do the same for the other leg. **Heel raise.** Stand with your feet slightly apart. Slowly lift yourself up on your toes and stay in this tip-toe position for about 10 counts. Then, slowly bring yourself back down on your feet.



The 12 Best Stretching Exercises at Your Desk

1. **Just stand up and sit down -- no hands**

- You might have gotten a gold star in preschool for sitting still, but it just goes to show you (best sellers notwithstanding) that not all of us learned everything we need to know in kindergarten. "If you stand up and sit down (over and over) -- without using your hands -- it can be a challenge," says Smith. "Do it while you're on the phone; no one will know."

2. **Substitute exercise for sitting -- while you work**

- Get rid of your desk chair and substitute an exercise ball, suggests Smith. "I used it for a while when I was having low-back problems; it was great," Smith says. "All day you are engaging all the muscles in the back, legs, butt, everything, to stay balanced."
- Hame knows one man who put a treadmill in his office and conducted all his business while walking. (He lost weight, too, Hame says.)

3. **Shrug your shoulders -- to release the neck and shoulders**

- Inhale deeply and shrug your shoulders, lifting them high up to your ears. Hold. Release and drop. Repeat three times.
- Shake your head slowly, yes and no. You might as well amuse yourself while you do it to relax even further. Ask yourself silly questions: "Is your boss an idiot?" Move your head up and down, "Yes, yes, yes." Side to side: "No. No. No." (Shedding tension is as much mental as physical.)

4. **Loosen the hands with air circles**

- Clench both fists, stretching both hands out in front of you.
- Make circles in the air, first in one direction, to the count of ten.
- Then reverse the circles.
- Shake out the hands.

5. **Point your fingers -- good for hands, wrist, and forearms**

- Stretch your left hand out in front of you, pointing fingers toward the floor. Use your right hand to increase the stretch, pushing your fingers down and toward the body. Be gentle.
- Do the same with the other hand.
- Now stretch your left hand out straight in front, wrist bent, with fingers pointing skyward. Use your right hand to increase the stretch, pulling the fingers back toward your body.
- Do the same on the other side.

6. **Release the upper body with a torso twist**

- Inhale and as you exhale, turn to the right and grab the back of your chair with your right hand, and grab the arm of the chair with your left.
- With eyes level, use your grasp on the chair to help twist your torso around as far to the back of the room as possible. Hold the twist and let your eyes continue the stretch -- see how far around the room you can peer.
- Slowly come back to facing forward.
- Repeat on the other side.



7. **Do leg extensions -- work the abs and legs**

- Grab the seat of your chair to brace yourself and extend your legs straight out in front of you so they are parallel to the floor.
- Flex and point your toes five times. Release.
- Repeat.



8. **Stretch your back with a "big hug"**
 - Hug your body, placing the right hand on your left shoulder and the left hand on your right shoulder.
 - Breathe in and out, releasing the area between your shoulder blades.
9. **Cross your arms -- for the shoulders and upper back**
 - Extend one arm out straight in front of you. With the other hand, grab the elbow of the outstretched arm and pull it across your chest, stretching your shoulder and upper back muscles.
 - Hold. Release.
 - Stretch out the other arm in front of you -- repeat.
10. **Stretch your back and shoulders with a "leg hug"**
 - Sit on the edge of your chair (if it has wheels, wedge the chair against the desk or wall to make sure it does not roll). Put your feet together, flat on the floor.
 - Lean over, chest to knees, letting your arms dangle loosely to the floor. Release your neck.
 - Now bring your hands behind your legs, right hand grasping left wrist, forearm (or elbow if you can reach that far), left hand grasping the right. Feel the stretch in your back, shoulders and neck. Hold.
 - Release your hands to the floor again.
 - Repeat three times or as often as it feels good.
11. **Look up to release upper body**
 - Sit up tall in your chair, or stand up. Stretch your arms overhead and interlock your fingers.
 - Turn the palms to the ceiling as you lift your chin up, tilt your head back, and gaze up at the ceiling, too.
 - Inhale, exhale, release.
12. **Substitute walks for email -- and don't eat at your desk**
 - Instead of emailing a colleague "and copying 25 people who don't want to be copied anyway," Smith says, "walk over to the colleague you really want to talk to."

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SOURCES:

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Three Simple Neck Stretches to Relieve Neck Pain and Stress

1. Whether you sit at a desk all day, work for hours at a computer, and have experienced a past neck injury, you can benefit from these simple neck stretches! **It will only take three to five minutes!** So....you can't use the "*I don't have the time*" excuse. It's also important to know that even though two of the three stretches don't directly involve the neck (*guess which ones*), the muscles being stretched are attached to the neck itself!
2. **Stretch 1: Neck Stretch**
3. *There are six ranges of motion of the neck.* For best results, you should stretch your neck in all six ranges for 10-15 seconds, but if you are in a hurry, just stretch the ranges that are painful or tight! To begin, sit with good posture in your chair. Reach and hold the seat of the chair with your hands.



- 4.
5. **Neck Flexion (Chin to Chest)** – Slowly begin to lower your neck down by lower your chin down to your chest and hold for 10-15 seconds.
6. **Neck Extension (Lean your head back)** – Lower your head back as far as you can.
7. **Right Lateral Flexion (Ear to Shoulder)** – Lower your right ear towards your right shoulder.
8. **Left Lateral Flexion (Ear to Shoulder)** – Lower your left ear towards your left shoulder.
9. **Right Rotation (Chin to Shoulder)** – Slowly turn your head to the right. Your chin will be close to your right shoulder.
10. **Left Rotation (Chin to Shoulder)** – Slowly turn your head to the left. Your chin will be close to your left shoulder.
11. **Stretch 2: Shoulder Shrugs**



- 12.
13. This particular stretch combines stretching with a common muscle relaxation technique called "Progressive Muscle Relaxation". It's really effective to relax the shoulders and neck!
14. Shrug your shoulders to your ears (as shown in the picture) and hold tightly for 2-3 seconds, still holding tightly rotate your shoulders back (you should feel a stretch in the pectoralis muscles or chest muscles) and then relax them down into normal position. Repeat for 10 repetitions for best results!
15. **Stretch 3: Upper Back Stretch**



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17. This great stretch works on the neck and upper back muscles.
18. Stretch your arms out in front of you and rotate your hands until your palms face away from each other. You can put both of the back of your hand together or you can put your palms together, whichever is most comfortable. Then bend over at the upper back like you are diving off the diving board. Be sure and flex your head (chin to chest) at the same time!
19. **Working every day to take a little stress out of your world...**

Benefits of meditation

- Lowers blood pressure/slow down the cardiovascular system
- Restores balanced function to the digestive system, aiding absorption of nutrients
- Relaxes the nervous system
- Relieves muscle tension
- Diminishes intensity of headaches/migraines
- Relieves insomnia
- Frees the mind from self-doubt and internal chatter
- Releases fears
- Reduces anxiety
- Improves depression
- Generates optimism, self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

