

Six Stretches to Do at Your Desk

Relieve tension in your wrists, back, and shoulders at work.

~Elise Browning Miller and Carol Blackman

Side Stretch

This is a great stretch to relieve computer-related tension in your wrists and to stretch your sides. It will also help relieve lower back tightness.

Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel. Inhale and stretch your arms out to the sides and then over your head with your palms facing each other. Exhale as you take hold of your left wrist with your right hand. With an inhalation, stretch the fingers of your left hand to the ceiling. Exhale as you gently stretch to the right, drawing out your left arm and wrist with the right hand, and move your hips to the left simultaneously. Keep your head and left arm in alignment with the torso. Don't drop your left arm in front of your face. Feel this stretch on the entire left side of your body, from your hips to your fingertips. Keep your feet solidly planted on the floor by pressing firmly down with your outer left heel. Continue to breathe softly as you stretch to the right, particularly noticing the deep stretch in the left rib cage as the breath enters your left lung. Inhale as you come back to center. Exhale and switch hands. Holding your right wrist with your left arm, inhale as you reach up through the fingers of your right hand. Exhale as you stretch to the left. Continue to breathe as you stretch to the left side. Inhale and return to the center. Repeat this sequence on each side.

Shoulder Rolls

Movement is one of the best things you can do for your back if you've been sitting in the same position for awhile. This particular movement helps relieve tension in the upper back and shoulders where the trapezius muscle is located.

Sitting upright, inhale as you lift your right shoulder to your ear. Exhale as you slowly roll your shoulder around and back, dropping it away from your ear. Continue these shoulder rolls three more times, alternating right and left.

Now, inhale as you lift both shoulders up to the ears. Exhale as you release them. Repeat five times and then relax your shoulders.

Neck Stretch

This stretch is particularly good for a stiff or compressed neck. You can really feel how it lengthens and stretches the neck, creating space between each of the vertebrae in the cervical spine.

Sit upright without letting your back touch the back of the chair. Align your head directly over your spine and feel the crown of your head lifting. You may want to hold on to the side of your chair seat with your left hand. Breathe in, and on the exhalation, drop your right ear toward your right shoulder without lifting your right shoulder or turning your head. Take several breaths in and out, feeling the stretch on the left side of your neck.

To create a deeper stretch, reach over your head and place your right hand on the left side of your head to gently pull your neck away from your shoulders. At the same time, you can hold firmly onto the chair with your left hand to draw your left shoulder away from your neck.

Visualize your neck lengthening and the muscles along your vertebrae relaxing. Hold the pose for at least five more breaths, then release your left hand from the chair and gently massage your neck and shoulders with your left hand. Slowly lift the head and switch sides to repeat the sequence.



Open Chest Stretch

This pose opens the chest, decreasing rounded shoulders and releasing tightness in the middle back. In addition, it helps decrease kyphosis, extreme forward curvature of the thoracic spine.

Sit near the edge of a chair and interlace your fingers behind you, with your palms facing your back. Leaning slightly forward, lift your arms and rest them on the back of the chair. Inhale and lift your chest. Exhale and relax your shoulders away from your ears. If your hands do not reach the top of the chair, clasp the sides of the chair back and pull your chest forward, relaxing your shoulders and opening your upper chest. Hold for 10 to 15 breaths, feeling lightness in your heart. With an exhalation, slowly release your hands and bring them down by your sides.

Chair Twist

Twists are the antidote to sitting for long periods of time. After twisting, you will feel the release of all the muscles in your back (particularly in the middle back) that have been locked into position from sitting a long time.

Sit toward the front of a chair, then swivel your thighs toward the right side of the chair so you are sitting diagonally on the seat. If you have an arm rest on the side of the chair, bring your thighs as close to it as possible. Inhale and lift your right arm up to the ceiling. With an exhalation, move your arm to the back of the chair on the opposite side, taking hold of the chair back. Bring the left hand to the right knee or chair handle. Inhale and lengthen your spine. Exhale and twist to the right, pressing your right hand against the back of the chair to deepen the twist. Visualize the shoulder blades dropping down as if they were hanging from weights. Breathe into your rib cage. Consciously relax the muscles in your back and gently twist a little farther. Stay in the pose for 10 to 15 breaths. Return to your center with an exhalation and repeat on the opposite side.

Back and Shoulder Release

Part One: Sit on the edge of a chair and place your feet about two and a half feet apart, parallel to each other. Lean forward and place your forearms on your inner thighs. Press your inner thighs out with your forearms. Breathe deeply in and out, feeling the stretch in your inner thighs.

Part Two: Make sure your knees are directly over your heels and your feet are parallel to each other. Slowly stretch your arms down towards the floor, resting your ribs on your thighs and your armpits towards your knees. Cross your arms, placing your hands at the opposite elbows. Continue to breathe deeply.

Part Three: For a deeper stretch of the back, stretch your arms forward toward your desk or the floor, reaching through the fingertips and feeling your spine lengthening. Round your back and slowly roll up, returning to a sitting position.

*Excerpted with permission from *Life Is a Stretch: Easy Yoga, Anytime, Anywhere* (Llewellyn Publications, 1999), by Elise Browning Miller and Carol Blackman.*

