

Stretching in the Workplace

stretching and relaxation exercises

Compliments of



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Disclaimer: Do not perform these exercises if you or your doctor feels there is a risk of injury to yourself. EMC Insurance Companies recommends that you consult with your doctor before undertaking any of these exercises, as certain factors, including lifestyle, age, existing and prior medical conditions, and hereditary factors, can increase the risk of injury.

Stretching in the Workplace

Stretching is an activity that can benefit nearly everyone. In the short term, stretching can help release muscle tension and relieve soreness. Over time, regular stretching can also decrease joint pain and stress, reduce risk of injury, increase range of motion and improve posture. It can help prepare muscles for more vigorous activities and can improve balance, stability and circulation.

Getting Started Safely

Talk to your doctor about any current or former musculoskeletal injuries or problems that might affect your ability to stretch safely and effectively.

Warm up your muscles before stretching by doing at least five minutes of low intensity activity such as walking or marching in place. Stretching a cold muscle increases the risk of pulls or tears. When it comes to stretching, your muscles act much like a rubber band. It's easy to stretch a warm rubber band, but if you try to stretch a cold one, you risk cracking or breaking it.

Stretching Technique

- Ease into each stretch; movements should not be fast or sudden.
- Take a deep breath and slowly exhale as you gently stretch a muscle to the point of tension.
- Stretch only to a point of MILD discomfort; stop if you feel pain.
- Concentrate on using proper form as you stretch.
- Hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds; do not bounce.
- Breathe deeply and continuously; avoid holding your breath.
- Relax and repeat the stretch 2-4 more times.
- Stretch both sides; use the same stretches for the same amount of time on both sides of your body.
- Stretch at least 2-3 days per week.

- Do not bounce as you stretch; this can cause injury.
- Do not stretch a muscle that is not warmed up.
- Do not strain or push a muscle too far; if you feel pain, ease up on the stretch.
- Do not hold your breath during the stretch.
- Do not stretch an injured muscle or joint.

During the work shift, it is important to perform body movements and frequently stretch the neck, shoulders, mid and lower back, hips, elbows/forearms and wrists to reverse daily awkward postures.

Measure Your Flexibility

The sit and reach test is a simple way to measure the flexibility of the backs of your legs, hips and lower back. Measuring flexibility on a regular basis can help you to see your progress.

To perform a sit and reach test:

1. Place a yardstick on the floor. Secure the stick by putting a piece of tape across the yardstick at the 15 inch mark.
2. Place the soles of your feet even with the 15 inch mark on the yardstick.
3. Reach forward as far as you can without raising your knees off the ground.
4. Hold the position for 2 seconds.
5. Repeat the test and record the best of 3 reaches.

Neck Retraction/Tuck

Why:

Use for stiff neck and shoulder muscles.

How:

1. Face straight ahead.
2. While keeping the back straight, pull your chin towards your chest until you feel a stretch along the back of your neck.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.



3-Way Neck Stretch

Why:

Use for stiff neck and shoulder muscles.



How:

1. Look straight ahead.
2. Place your right hand on your left shoulder.
3. Gently pull down and tip your head toward right shoulder.
4. Hold for 10-15 seconds.

How:

1. With the right hand holding down the left shoulder, look down and over your right shoulder.
2. Hold for 10-15 seconds.

How:

1. With your right hand holding down left shoulder, tip your head toward your right shoulder.
2. Gently look back over your right shoulder.
3. Hold for 10-15 seconds.

Shoulders and Arms

Shoulder Shrug

Why:

Relax neck, shoulders and upper back.



How:

1. Slowly bring your shoulders up toward your ears.
2. Hold for 5 seconds.
3. Roll shoulders back and down.
4. Relax and repeat 5-10 times.

Shoulder Stretch

Why:

Relax the muscles in the back of the shoulder.

How:

1. Reach your left arm across the front of your chest at shoulder level.
2. Apply pressure towards your body with your right hand.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
4. Repeat on other side.



Tip:

Change this stretch by varying the angle of your shoulder across your body, either above or below shoulder level at an angle.

Arm Stretch

Why:

Stretch and relax the muscles along the front and back of shoulders.



How:

1. Extend your arms to the side and slightly behind you.
2. Gently try to squeeze your shoulder blades together.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Bring the arms forward and touch the backs of your hands together.
5. Hold for 5 seconds.
6. Repeat 5 times.

Arm and Elbow Exercise

Why:

Keep elbows limber, stretch and relax arms.



How:

1. Stretch arms in front, palms facing ceiling.
2. Curl your arms up as far as you can.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Repeat with palms facing the floor.
5. Repeat complete exercises 5 times.

Back Scratch

Why:

Stretch and relax arms.

How:

1. Gently hold your elbow with your opposite hand.
2. Pull your elbow behind your head.
3. Reach your hand toward the middle of your back until you feel a gentle stretch.
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
5. Relax and repeat on other side.



Hands, Wrists and Forearms

Wrist Stretch

Why:

Improve wrist strength and flexibility.

How:

1. Hold right arm out in front of you at shoulder level.
2. Fully extend your arm with your palm facing up.
3. With your left hand, gently pull your right fingers back (all except thumb).
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Forearm Stretch

Why:

Relax and stretch the forearm.

How:

1. Extend your right arm out in front of you with all fingers fully extended.
2. With your left hand, gently pull your fingers (all but thumb) back until you feel a forearm stretch.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Additional stretch:

Add a rotation to the inside and outside holding for 5 seconds in each position.

Alternate Forearm Stretch

Why:

Relax and stretch the forearm.

How:

1. Hold both hands in front of your body at shoulder level.
2. Fully extend your arms with your palms down.
3. Make a fist with both hands.
4. Hold for 5 seconds with fists down towards floor.
5. Rotate wrists to face each other and hold for another 5 seconds.
6. Rotate wrists away from each other and hold for another 5 seconds.



Prayer Position

Why:

Improve wrist strength and flexibility.

How:

- 1.



- Place your hands together, finger-to-finger, palm-to-palm, in prayer pose in front of the heart center.
2. Slowly inhale, pressing the palms of your hands firmly together, fingers pointing up.
 3. Holding the prayer pose, exhale slowly as you lower your hands as far as possible.
 4. Inhale and slowly raise your hands in front.
 5. Repeat 5 times, remembering to maintain prayer pose.

Hand Massage

Why:

Stretch and relax the hands. This can be done frequently during a work shift.



How:

1. Massage the inside and outside of the hand using the thumb and fingers.
2. Repeat frequently (including before beginning work).

Hand Fist

Why:

Relax the hands and strengthen the wrists.



How:

1. Make a tight fist.
2. Hold for 5 counts.
3. Open fist, spreading and stretching the fingers as far as possible.
4. Hold for 5 counts.
5. Repeat 5 times.

Upper and Lower Back

Arm and Shoulder Stretch

Why:

Stretch and relax the upper back.

How:

1. Lace your fingers together and turn your palms facing out.
2. Straighten your arms out in front of you.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.



Reach for the Sky

Why:

Stretch and relax upper back, neck and shoulders.

How:

1. Standing up straight, reach with both hands toward the sky.
2. Look up at your hands.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.



Back Bend

Why:

Reduce fatigue and pain in the lower back. (You should do this stretch frequently during the workday.)

How:

1. Looking straight ahead, stand tall and put your hands on your hips.
2. Gently bend backwards.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.



Shoulder Blade Stretch

Why:

Stretch and relax the upper back.



How:

1. Cross right arm over left arm, palms out or down.
2. Bend at elbows allowing the backs of arms to touch.
3. Try to bring the backs of hands flat against each other.
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
5. For a deeper stretch, bring elbows up level with shoulders.
6. Relax and repeat on the other side.

Standing Side Bend

Why:

Increase the range of motion in the spine.

How:

1. Stand up straight with your left hand on your left hip.
2. Bend towards your left side with your right hand overhead and hold for 15-30 seconds.
3. Relax and repeat on the other side.



Side Bend Alternate

Why:

Increase the range of motion in the spine.

How:

1. Stand up straight with your arms at your sides and feet shoulder width apart.
2. Bend your trunk sideways to the left while sliding your left hand down your thigh and reaching your right arm over your head.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Standing Trunk Rotation

Why:

Increase the range of motion in the spine.

How:

1. Stand up straight.
2. Reach your right hand up and angle it toward your left shoulder.
3. Twist your body towards the left side.
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.

Alternative:

If you feel pain in the lower back/ shoulder, you can put your arms down and place them on your hips.



Hug Stretch

Why:

Relax your upper back.

How:

1. Hug your body by placing your right hand on your left shoulder and your left hand on your right shoulder.
2. Breathe in and out while holding for 15-30 seconds.



Lower Body

Quadricep Stretch

Why:

Stretch the quadriceps muscle that runs along the front of your thigh.



How:

1. Stand on one leg. (Use a wall or another sturdy surface if you need support.)
2. Bend your knee and bring your heel toward your buttock.
3. Reach for your ankle with your hand.
4. Stand up straight.
5. Gently pull your heel up and back until you feel a stretch in the front of your thigh.
6. Keep your knees close together.
7. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
8. Switch legs and repeat.

Tip:

Be careful not to strain your knee—the goal of this stretch is to stretch the thigh, not to touch your heel to your buttock.

Standing Calf Stretch

Why:

Stretch the calf muscle that runs along the back of your lower leg.

How:

1. With both hands resting on a wall, stand at an arm's length away.
2. Place your left foot about 1½ feet behind your right foot.
3. Slowly bend your right leg forward.
4. Keep your left knee straight and your left heel on the ground.
5. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
6. Switch legs and repeat.



Alternate Calf Stretch

Why:

Stretch the calf muscle that runs along the back of your lower leg.

How:

1. Stand next to a wall and lean on it with your forearms.
2. Rest your head on your hands.
3. Bend one leg and place your foot on the ground in front of you, with the other leg straight behind.
4. Slowly move your hips forward, keeping your lower back flat.
5. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
6. Switch legs and repeat.



Stair Calf Stretch

Why:

Stretch and relax your calf muscles.

How:

1. Stand up straight on the stairs.
2. Hang on to two rails with toes pointing straight ahead.
3. Slowly lower your heels towards the step below.
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.



Standing Forward Bend

Why:

Relax your shoulders and hamstrings.

How:

1. Stand up straight with shoulders relaxed and back.
2. Reach your arms behind your back and interlace your fingers.
3. Lift your shoulders up toward your ears and lift hands away from your back.
4. Slowly bend forward at the waist, keeping your back flat, not rounded.
5. Continue bending forward and lift your hands overhead as far forward as comfortable.
6. Hold for 15-30 seconds.



Hamstring Stretch

Why:

Stretch hamstrings.



How:

1. Stand with feet shoulder width apart.
2. Squat down with elbows on knees.
3. Slowly straighten legs.
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
5. Return to squat position and then slowly stand up using arm support.

Iliotibial Band Stretch

Why:

Stretch the iliotibial band muscle that runs along the outside of your hip, thigh and knee.

How:

1. Stand near a wall for support.
2. Cross your left leg over your right leg at the ankle.
3. Extend your left arm overhead, reaching toward your right side. (You should feel this stretch along your left hip.)
4. Hold the stretch for 15-30 seconds.
5. Switch sides and repeat.



Hip Flexor Stretch

Why:

Stretch and relax the hip flexors located on your upper thighs, just below the hipbone.

How:

1. Begin in a forward lunge position and place your hands on your knee.
2. Press down with your hands and extend the hips forward. (You should feel a stretch from the front of your hip, groin and thigh.)
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
4. Switch legs and repeat.



Hip Flexor/Calf Stretch

Why:

Relax your lower back, knees, hips, feet and total body.



How:

1. Stand up straight, facing a wall.
2. Lean forward and touch the wall with your hands at approximately shoulder level.
3. Slowly raise your right knee as high as you can (comfortably).
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
5. Switch knees and repeat.

Hip Adductor/Groin Stretch

Why:

Relax your lower back, knees and hips.

How:

1. Start with feet wider than shoulder width apart and feet pointed forward.
2. Slowly bend forward reaching down towards the floor (between your feet) with both hands.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds.



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