

Exercises You Can Do While Sitting at Your Desk

Sitting at a desk to work all day is not good for the body. However, if you have to sit for a long period of time, there are some simple exercises you can do to improve your overall body health.

Hands and Arms

- **Hand stretches:** Make fists and tense the muscles in your hands, then relax. Next, spread and stretch your fingers as wide as possible, and then relax.
- **Finger stretches:** Put your index finger on the edge of your desk. Keeping your wrist straight, gently push your finger into the desk and hold as you take a couple of deep breaths. Repeat with all fingers. Do not stretch the thumbs using this method.
- **Thumb stretches:** Put your left palm on the top of your desk. Keep your wrist straight and relax all of your fingers. With your right hand, stretch your thumb away from your forefinger as far as is comfortable. Hold and take a few deep breaths. Release and then repeat with the other thumb.
- **Hand grips:** Get a stress ball or a hand grip; squeeze it to strengthen forearm muscles and relieve hand stress.
- **Wrist rolls:** Regularly rolling your wrists helps prevent carpal tunnel syndrome and improve blood circulation.
- **Reach and stretch:** Reach forward to the sides and above your head to stretch your arms. Simple stretches help prevent stiffness. They also help relax the muscles and, in turn, prevent pinched nerves and other complications from tense muscles.
- **Shoulder rolls:** Roll your shoulders forward and then roll them backward. This helps relieve the tension in the shoulder and upper back muscles.
- **Add some weight:** Take two filled water bottles or two books, and put one in each hand. With your arms starting at your sides, slowly lift the items up, holding your arms out to the sides. Hold for a few seconds and then lower slowly. Repeat this at least 10 times. This will strengthen your upper arms and shoulders.
- **Bicep curl:** Hold a filled water bottle in your hand. Sit up straight in your chair, and hold the bottle in your arm with your palm facing up. Curl your arm so the bottle goes to shoulder level. Repeat at least five times and then switch to the other arm. Even with the light weight of a water bottle, this will help strengthen biceps.
- **Rubberband stretch:** Get a large rubber or elastic band. Grab it with both hands, and pull it outward while stretching the arms.

Feet and Legs

- **Stand and stretch:** Get up from your chair at least every half hour to stretch or walk around. This will help prevent blood clots from developing in your legs. (Blood clots are very common among middle-aged workers who sit for long periods of time.)
- **Ankle rolls:** In a sitting position, lift each leg slightly and roll each ankle. This helps improve blood circulation and prevent the tingling, pins-and-needles feeling a person can get when blood circulation is cut off.
- **Raise your toes:** Keep your heels on the ground and lift your toes. This helps blood circulation to the feet. While it works well in a seated position, it works best if you can stand.
- **Calf stretches:** Put both legs in front of you while sitting. Lift your legs on the balls of the feet and set them down. Rest when your calves are tired, and then repeat after about 10 minutes. Do three repetitions to exercise the calf muscles.
- **Hip flexes:** While sitting in a chair, lift one foot slightly off the floor. Keep your knee bent in a 90-degree angle, and hold the position for as long as possible. This helps strengthen thigh muscles.

Neck

- **Neck rolls:** Drop your chin and slowly and carefully roll your neck. Raise the chin up and slowly bend your neck to each side, trying to touch your ear to your shoulder without raising your shoulder. This helps lessen tension and neck strain.
- **Just shrug:** Pull your shoulders up to your ears, and then release the tension and drop your shoulders. Do this at least three times to relieve tension in the shoulders and neck.

Torso

- **Get on the ball:** Purchase a large-size stability ball or stability ball-style desk chair. Sitting on it daily helps keep your back straight and abs firm.
- **Tone your abs:** While sitting, take a deep breath in, suck in your stomach, hold the position and then release slowly. Repeat a number of times.
- **Reverse stretch:** People who sit at a desk or work on a computer all day tend to hunch forward. Take time to counter that position with backward stretches. Open your arms wide, rotate your wrists so both thumbs point up and backward, and then pull your shoulders back. You should feel the muscles stretch in your shoulders and upper chest.
- **Twist:** Sit up straight and place your right arm behind your right hip. Twist to the right and hold. Do this again with your left arm and hip. You should feel the muscles on your sides and back stretch.

Resources

National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov