Effective stretching
for the workplace

mohs
workplace health

Bringing health to life

Certain repetitive activities in the workplace, such as sitting at a desk, standing for long periods, lifting objects or operating machine tools, can create tension and tightness in your muscles and may contribute to parts of the body becoming sore. Areas particularly affected can include neck, shoulders, elbows and back.

The stretches outlined here have been designed by a team of physiotherapists to assist in preventing the onset of tension and stiffness, or to ease any pain if it occurs.

Do these stretches regularly and your body should gradually become more flexible and less tense.

How to stretch

Stretching should be done slowly and without bouncing. Stretch to where you feel a slight 'pull' and then hold the position for up to 5 seconds. Your breathing should be slow and deep.

Word of caution

Only hold stretches that feel good to you. Never force your body to go beyond what it is currently capable of.

If you experience any pain or discomfort while doing a stretch, stop immediately. If the pain persists, consult your GP or seek advice from a qualified physiotherapist.

The Exercises

Try a few of these exercises every hour and rotate them to get the maximum effect. Many of the exercises can be done seated at your desk. Try not to overstretch.

Hands

Hand/finger stretch

- With arms stretched out straight, separate and straighten your fingers until a 'pull' is felt in each finger
- Hold for 5 seconds. Relax, then bend your fingers at the knuckles and hold for a further 5 seconds. Repeat twice.

Wrists

Palms together stretch

- Place hands palm to palm (with fingers pointing upwards) at chest level. Rotate hands downwards, keeping palms together and elbows even
- Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat once.

Neck

Retraction

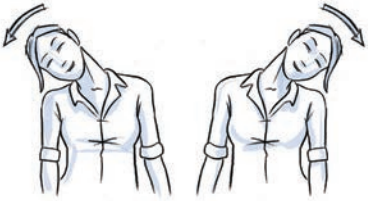
This exercise will stretch out the tissue at the back of the neck and lift a lot of the pressure and stress on the area.

- Stand straight with a slight curve in the base of the spine
- Focus on an object at eye level as if you were looking at the horizon
- Slowly without moving your shoulder and without looking up or down, bring your head back and tuck your chin in and hold for 2–3 seconds

Do 5 of these 3 times a day to help reduce the gradual increase of strain on your neck and shoulders.

Chin tuck

- With your head facing forward, gently tilt your head down to stretch the back of the neck
- Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 2–3 times.



Side tilt

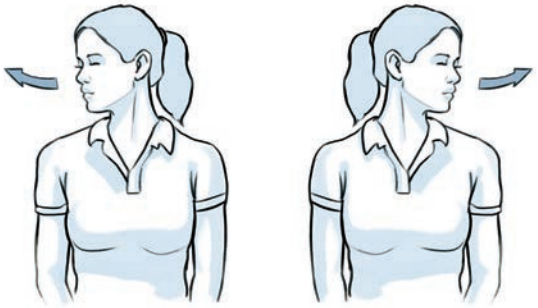
- With your head facing forward, slowly tilt your head to the left side
- Hold for 5 seconds. Then do the other side. Repeat twice on both sides.

Side to side

Over time, you can start to lose some movement in the neck and rotation is one of those movements. By doing this exercise daily, you can maintain this very important movement.

- With your head facing forward, turn your chin towards your left shoulder to create a stretch on the right side of your neck
- Hold for 5 seconds, then repeat movement on the other side

Do 5 of these to each side, 10 in total, once a day.



Shoulders

Side stretch

- Hold left elbow with right hand and gently pull elbow behind head until an easy stretch is felt in the shoulder and back of the upper arm
- Hold for 5 seconds (but do not overstretch). Repeat on the other side. Do both sides twice.

Elbow pull

- Hold your left arm just above the elbow with the right hand. Gently pull the elbow towards the opposite shoulder as you look over your left shoulder.
- Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Do both sides twice.

Stretching the shoulder blade

This muscle can become tight over time so keeping it loose with this exercise can reduce the likelihood of neck problems starting.

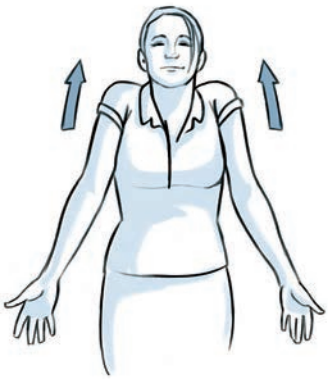
- Stand straight and place one hand behind the buttock and lower that shoulder, this will start to put the shoulder blade muscle on a stretch
- To increase the stretch turn your head to the opposite side and look down. Hold for 5 seconds.
- To increase the stretch even further, gently pull down on your head with the other hand and maintain the position when you feel a stretching sensation

Repeat 3 times on either shoulder once a day.

Lifting the shoulders up and down

When working in manual environments, the shoulders can become a little stiff and the muscles tight.

This exercise will stretch out the tissue around the shoulders and lift a lot of pressure and stress on the area.



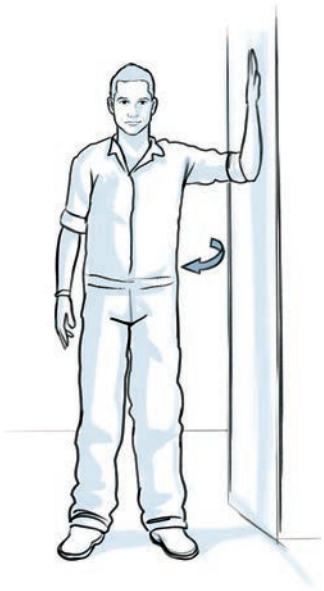
- Stand upright, look forward and tuck your chin in slightly
- Place your arms relaxed on each side of your body and lift your shoulders towards your ears as high as you can, hold for 2 seconds and then lower to the start position and repeat
- Now again with your arms relaxed on each side of your body, pull the tip of your shoulders backward and then lower your shoulders as far as you can, hold for 2 seconds and then raise to the start position and repeat
- Raise your shoulders 5 times and lower your shoulders 5 times

Stretching the shoulders backwards

Again, this exercise will stretch out the tissue around the shoulders and lift a lot of pressure and stress on the area.

- Stand upright, look forward and tuck your chin in slightly
- Place your arms relaxed on each side of your body and pull your shoulders forward as far as you can, hold for 2 seconds and then return to the start position and repeat
- Now again with your arms relaxed on each side of your body, pull your shoulders backwards as far as you can, hold for 2 seconds and then return to the start position and repeat
- Push your shoulders forwards 5 times and pull your shoulders backwards 5 times

Do this twice a day to help reduce the gradual build up of tightness in the shoulders and maintain the correct range of movement.



Stretching your pecks

Over time, particularly if you work in a manual environment, the muscle at the front of your chest (the pectoral muscle) can become tight and can really start to affect the movement and function of the shoulder.

- Stand beside a wall, raise your arm to 90 degrees and put your arm on the wall with the elbow bent
- Stretch the front of your shoulder by moving forward and turning your body the opposite way
- Hold the stretch for 5 seconds and then repeat 3 times
- Turn around and perform the stretch with the other arm

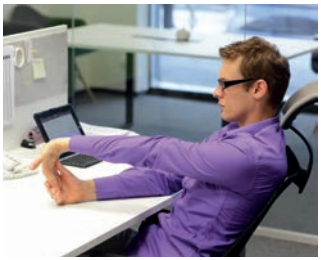
Do this exercise once a day, to help prevent the gradual build up of stiffness and tightness in the pectoral muscle.

Stretching the shoulders backwards

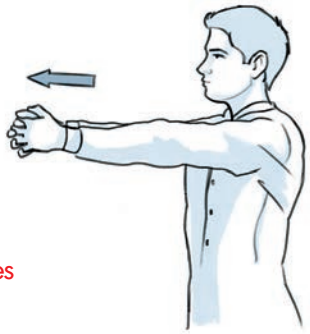
With this exercise, stand up straight with your shoulders back and your back straight.

- Place both hands behind your back and cross your fingers
- Raise your hands away from your back until you feel a gentle stretch across your chest and in front of your shoulders. Hold for 5 seconds.
- Return to the start position and repeat 3 times
- Please remember not to lean your body forward and keep your back straight

Do this exercise once a day to help prevent the gradual build up of stiffness and tightness in the pectoral muscle and the front of the shoulders.



Stretching upper trapezius



Your rhomboids (on the inside of the shoulder blades) can become tight over time from repeated lifting and carrying. Keeping this muscle loose will reduce the tension on the shoulder blades, the upper part of your back and the neck.

- Stand upright and raise your arms forward grasping your hands together
- Spread your shoulder blades apart by pulling your arms forward until you feel a stretch between your shoulder blades
- Hold this stretch for 2–3 seconds and repeat 3 times

This good, general stretch can be done 2–3 times a day.

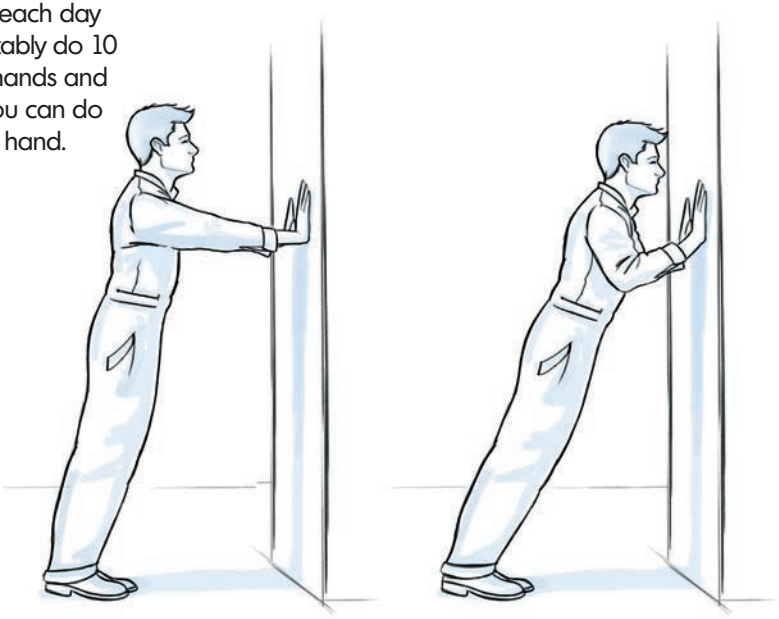
Elbows

Strengthening the triceps

This exercise can really help improve the strength around the elbow.

- Stand in front of a wall in a plank position and place both hands on the wall just over a shoulders distance apart
- Do push ups towards the wall as low as possible
- Keep the chin in and the shoulders and trunk stable while performing this exercise

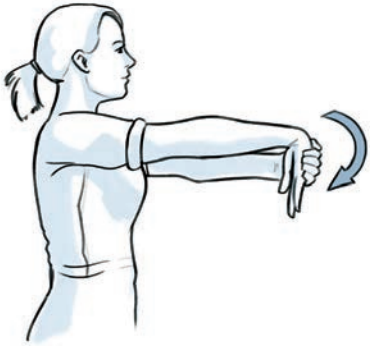
Practice this exercise each day until you can comfortably do 10 press ups with both hands and then progress until you can do 5 press ups with one hand.



Arms

Stretching the muscles in the back of the forearm

This exercise stretches the muscles in the back of the forearm (which can become tight from performing repetitive activities) and helps to maintain the movement in this area.



- Stand upright and extend one arm out with the elbow straight and use the other hand to grasp the extended hand and then bend the wrist gently downwards to apply the stretch to the area
- Hold the stretch for 5 seconds, repeat 3 times and then do the same with the other arm
- Keep the elbow straight during this exercise

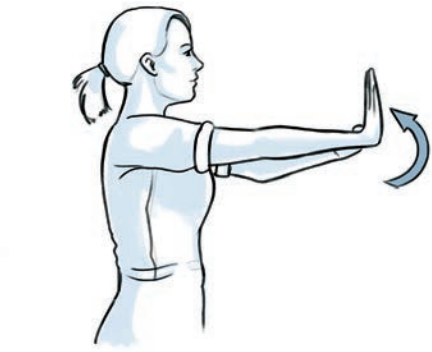
Do this exercise twice a day to help prevent the gradual build up of stiffness and tightness in the back of the forearm.

Stretching the muscle in the front of the forearm

This exercise stretches the muscles in the front of the forearm (which can become tight from performing repetitive activities) and helps to maintain the movement in this area.

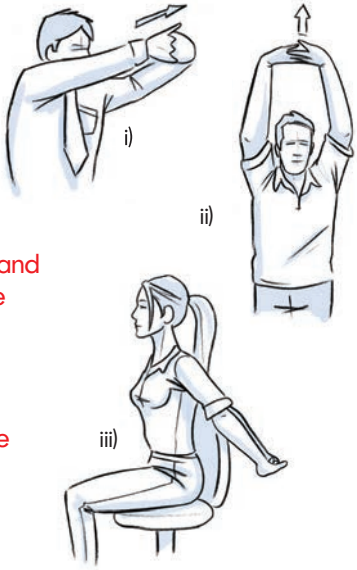
- Stand upright and extend one arm out with the elbow straight and use the other hand to grasp the extended hand and then bend the hand gently backwards to apply the stretch to the area
- Hold the stretch for 5 seconds, repeat 3 times and then do the same with the other arm
- Keep the elbow straight during this exercise

Do this exercise twice a day to help prevent the gradual build up of stiffness and tightness in the front of the forearm.



Arms

Three linked finger stretches



i) Interlace fingers, then straighten arms out in front of you, with palms facing away

Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat twice.

ii) Keeping fingers interlaced, with arms straight out and palms facing away, raise your arms above your head and feel the stretch in the arms and upper sides of rib cage

Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat twice.

iii) Interlace fingers behind your back with palms facing inwards this time. Slowly pull your shoulders back while straightening your arms.

Hold for 5 seconds. Do twice. (This stretch can be done when you find yourself slumping forward into a 'dowager's hump').

Back and hip stretch

Seated waist twist

- Cross your left leg over the right one, then rest the elbow of the right arm on the outside of the upper thigh of the left leg and turn and look over your left shoulder
- Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat on the other side.

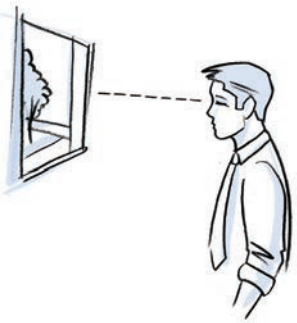
Legs

Hamstring stretch

- Hold your lower leg just below the knee. Gently pull the bent leg up towards your chest
- Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat with opposite leg.

Eyes

- Every 20 minutes working at the screen, refocus eyes on a point further away for 5 seconds

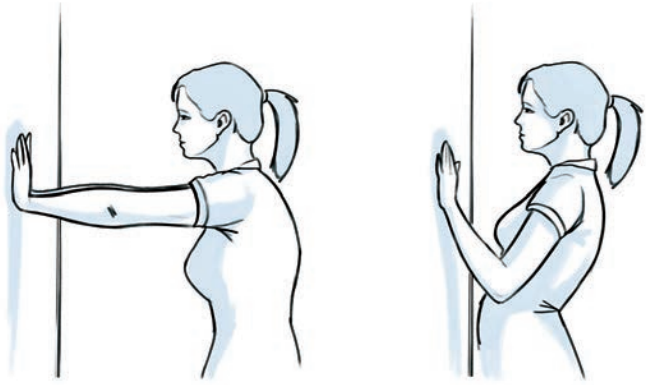


Lower back

Lower back stretching when standing

When working in a manual environment, the pressure in the disc can gradually increase throughout a working day.

This extension exercise can quickly and easily reduce that pressure to a more normal level and reduce the likelihood of the onset of lower back pain and stiffness.



Step 1 Step 2

- Stand facing a wall with your feet shoulder width apart and hands on the wall at shoulder height
- Allow your back to arch until you feel a gentle stretch in the base of the spine
- Slowly return to the starting position and repeat

Repeat 3 times at intervals throughout the day.

Lower back side bending

The lower back is prone to becoming stiff and tight and therefore the movements can become restricted.

When this happens, it can cause more stress so it's important to maintain the movement in this part of the lower back.

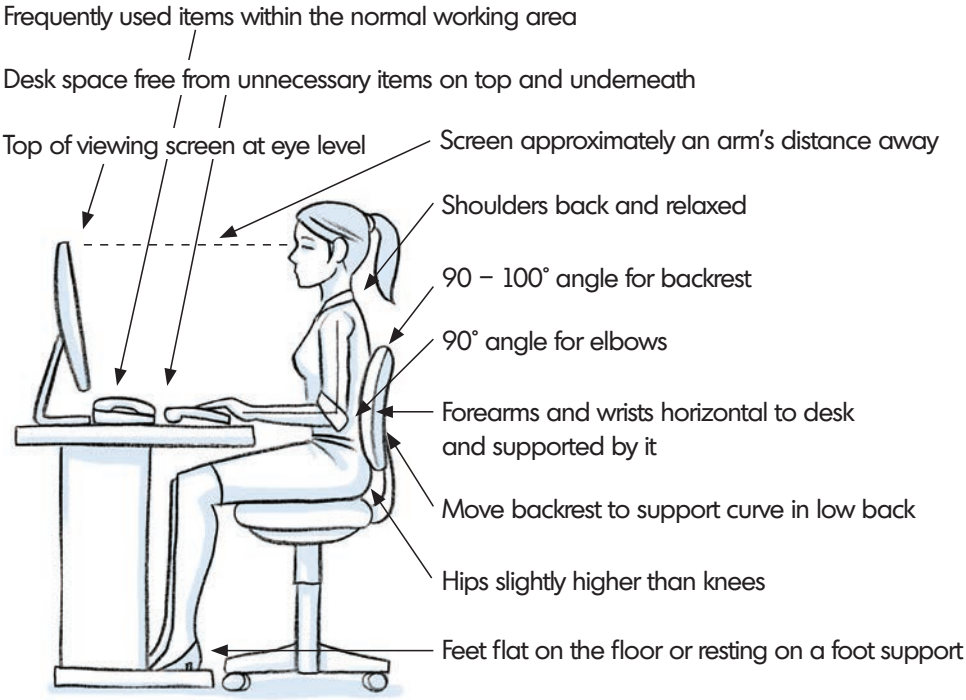
- Stand upright with arms on the outside of your thighs
- Slowly bend sideways by sliding one hand down one thigh towards the floor
- Slowly return to the neutral position and repeat on the other side

Repeat this 3 times on each side 2–3 times per day.

Sitting comfortably, sitting happy

Sitting at a computer for long periods can take its toll on your body. Unless you are sitting with correct posture, it is easy to end up with back, neck or knee pains, and a tingling in the hands and fingers.

Here is a simple yet effective guide to sitting comfortably at your computer. (It is not recommended that laptops are used as work stations because the screen and keyboard cannot be separated).



The stretches featured in this leaflet are supplied by PhysioMed

Please visit www.physiomed.co.uk for further information

Please be aware that MOHS Workplace Health and PhysioMed are not liable for your health and wellbeing as a consequence of following these exercises.

Please consult your GP and/or physiotherapist before starting any new exercise or musculoskeletal rehabilitation programme.

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