

Stretching

an Antidote for Stress



Our bodies are in a state of tension every day. This tension lies in different muscle groups – for example, in the legs, arms, neck, head, shoulders, and back. Muscle tension can even be stored in the hands and fingers.

Why Stretch? When we can, we naturally release some of this body tension by walking, getting up from our desk and moving around, or by engaging in regular exercise. Sometimes, however, we do not have the time or space to release unwanted body tension. We may be driving in the car or have to remain seated to work for an extended period of time at a computer. Stretching is a technique that may be used to release tension when you are unable to “walk it off.”

Normal Body Tension. Right now your body is in a state of muscle tension that is necessary to support the movements you make, such as walking, talking, reaching, leaning, writing, or using your hands for activities such as operating a keyboard and mouse on a computer and maintaining your posture. No body tension at all would simply mean that the body would fall over.

Too Much Body Tension. Too much body tension leads to discomfort and cramps. In extreme cases, unrelieved tension interferes with our thought processes and how we feel about ourselves. Excessive body tension can also lead to headaches, backaches, bad temper, and poor relationships with other people.

The following three stretches are designed to get you started in the stretching for stress relief process. Please note: If you have any health concerns, please consult a physician before beginning a new stretching or exercise program.

Upper-Back Stretch

- Put your fingertips on your shoulders, with elbows out to the side
- Raise your elbows until they are in line with your shoulders
- Now, bring your elbows forward until they touch or almost touch each other – hold for 5 to 10 seconds
- Let your arms fall comfortably on your side
- Repeat 2 to 3 times



Pectoral Stretch and Squeeze

- Put both of your hands behind your head - your fingers interlaced
- Bring your elbows back as far as you can
- Hold that tension for 5 to 10 seconds
- Release the tension
- Repeat 2 to 3 times



Leg Lift

- Sitting in a chair, lift both of your legs straight up in front of you – at the same time curl your toes toward you
- Hold the tension for 5 to 10 seconds
- Let your feet fall to the floor
- Repeat 2 to 3 times



For more stretches refer to the following reference:

Lemay, M. (2003). Essential Stress: Gentle Movements for Stress Relief, Flexibility, and overall Well-Being, Berkley Publishing Group: New York, NY.