



## THURSDAY: Fitting Fitness In Day

### Main Activity: Stretch n' Fit

#### **Introduction**

Sitting at a desk or computer, or standing at your workstation for extended periods of time can cause muscle tension, stiffness and strain in your neck, arms, wrists, hands, back and legs. It is recommended to take short stretch breaks at least once per hour. Taking frequent, shorter breaks where you can regularly relax and stretch your muscles is preferable to taking longer, fewer breaks.

#### **Goal of the activity**

Encourage each employee to do some simple stretches at their workstation or desk at regular intervals throughout the day. The ultimate goal would be to have employees make daily workplace stretching a part of their normal routine.

#### **Implementation of activity**

1. Encourage employees to bring their running shoes to work today to serve as a constant reminder to stretch and be active in the workplace.
2. Have a group of volunteers at the workplace lead a group stretch in the morning before the day begins. Ensure that the volunteers have the handout on stretching (included below) so they are able to discuss proper technique and the benefits of each stretch. Weather permitting, have the stretching take place outside to refresh employees with the fresh air. Before ending the stretch session, go over daily stretch breaks with employees and ensure they understand some of the stretches they could be doing.
3. Send a reminder via email to ask employees to fill out their stretch break worksheet. Encourage employees to take breaks by asking them to schedule them in their day timers and/or computers.
4. Seek out some volunteers to act as the "stretch patrol" to monitor the workplace and see if they can "catch" any one stretching on the job. *Budget permitting*, you can give out small rewards to those "caught" stretching.
5. At the end of the workday, have employees hand in their stretch worksheet as documentation of their completed activity.

#### **Materials Needed**

- Group stretching handout
- Stretching worksheet to record breaks taken
- Small prizes or rewards for employees (ex.: juice boxes, small boxes of raisins, popcorn, pretzels, gift certificates, granola bars, water bottles etc...)

#### **Supplemental Activities**

- Set up a staff intramural sports tournament on a regular basis at a nearby playing field or gym
- Set up a workplace scavenger hunt and have employees wear their runners while completing hunt. Give clues to employees to a destination, and at each destination, employees must complete a fitness task (example: 20 jumping jacks, 10 squats etc...) to obtain their next clue
- Bring in a yoga instructor who can provide 50-minute classes throughout the day
- Stairway to Health program by Health Canada (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/sth-evs/english/index.htm>)



# Stop ... Breathe ... Stretch!

Use this stretching worksheet to record all the stretch breaks you've taken today.

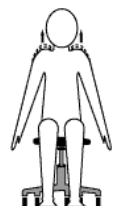
## **BREATHE IN ... BREATHE OUT!**

Inhale very slowly through your nose and make sure to expand your stomach muscles and allow the air to fill your lungs. Reverse as you *exhale*. Do this exercise for three to five minutes whenever you feel tense.

*I took a deep breath in.*

## **SHRUG IS THE WORD!**

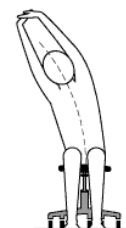
Raise the top of your shoulders towards your ears until you feel slight tension in your neck and shoulders. Hold this feeling of tension for 3 to 5 seconds. Then relax your shoulders downward into their normal position. Do this 2 or 3 times.



*I gave my shoulders a good shrug.*

## **REACH FOR THE STAR!**

Interlace your fingers and lift your arms over your head, keeping the elbows straight. Press arms as far back as you can. To stretch your sides, slowly lean to the left and then to the right.



*I gave my back a good stretch and reached for the star that was lurking on the ceiling!*

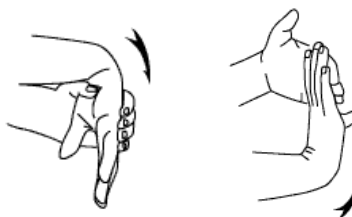
## **HA! I LOOKED AWAY!**

Give your eyes a rest from your surroundings by looking away for a few moments. Looking out the window or away from your computer and/or normal surroundings can ease & relax strained eyes.

*I relaxed my eye muscles by looking away.*

## **WORK YOUR WRIST!**

Grasp hand and hold fingers with the other hand. Slowly bend wrist down until you feel a stretch. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times. Then slowly bend your wrist up until you feel the stretch. Hold & relax.



*It felt good to stretch my wrists and give them a workout to relax yet strengthen them.*



## **A Stretch-Break Program for Your Workplace!**

### **Why is stretching at work important?**

Sitting at a desk or computer; or standing at your work station for extended periods of time can cause muscle tension, stiffness, and strain in the neck, arms, wrists, hands, back, and legs.

### **Downloadable stretch-breaks to post at work! (attached)**

Click on the links below to download an information page on stretching, plus these 5 easy-to-post and easy-to-follow stretch routines to place in strategic spots around your workplace.

- A. [Have You Taken a Stretch Break Today?](#)**
- B. [Neck and Shoulder Stretches](#)**
- C. [Hand and Forearm Stretches](#)**
- D. [Back Stretches](#)**
- E. [Leg Stretches](#)**
- F. [Stop & Smell the Roses! \(General Relaxation\)](#)**

### **Encourage employees to take frequent breaks**

It is recommended to take short stretch breaks at least once per hour. Taking frequent, shorter breaks where you can regularly relax and stretch your muscles is preferable to taking longer, fewer breaks. If your job is data entry, you should take a 5-minute exercise break for every 30 continuous data entry minutes spent on the computer. Spontaneously stretching any area of the body that feels tense will also help reduce pain and stress on your muscles.

### **Consider bringing in a speaker during CHWW**

Provide staff with an information session on the importance of stretching by a physiotherapist or ergonomist during Canada's Healthy Workplace Week.

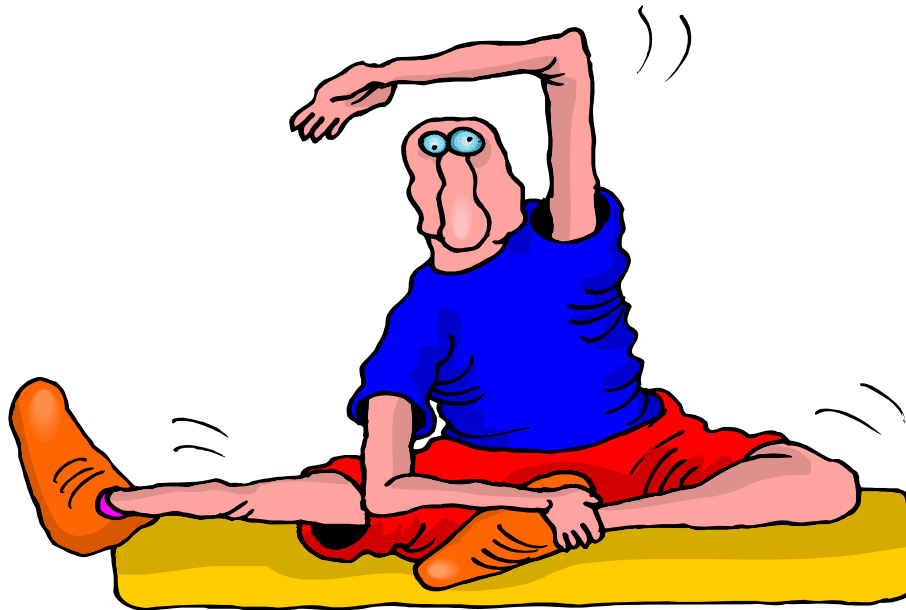


### **References:**

1. "Office Ergonomics Safety Guide, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition" by CCOHS, 2001
2. [http://www.region.halton.on.ca/health/programs/hearthealth/hearthealth\\_PDFs/physical\\_activity/Exercises\\_at\\_your\\_desk.pdf](http://www.region.halton.on.ca/health/programs/hearthealth/hearthealth_PDFs/physical_activity/Exercises_at_your_desk.pdf)
3. [http://www.cmha.ca/english/coping\\_with\\_stress/index.html](http://www.cmha.ca/english/coping_with_stress/index.html)



# Have You Taken a Stretch Break Today?



## Why?

We're not designed to stay in one position all day long. Taking regular breaks to stretch major muscle groups can help reduce injury, muscular tension and stiffness.

## When?

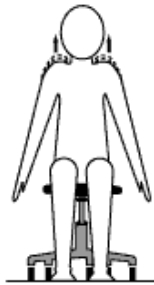
At least once per hour, but more frequently if possible. If you are doing data entry, you should take a 5-minute break for every 30 continuous data entry minutes spent on the computer.



## Stretching the Neck & Shoulders

### 1. Shoulder Shrug:

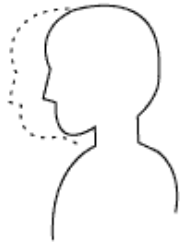
**Purpose:** to relieve early symptoms of tightness or tension in the shoulder and neck area.



- Raise the top of your shoulders towards your ears until you feel slight tension in your neck and shoulders. Hold this feeling of tension for 3 to 5 seconds. Then relax your shoulders downward into their normal position. Do this 2 or 3 times.

### 2. Head Glide:

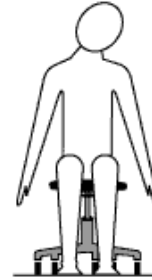
**Purpose:** to stretch your chest, neck and shoulder muscles.



- Sit or stand upright. Without lifting your chin, glide your head straight back. You know you are doing this exercise right if it gives you the feeling of a double chin. Hold for 20 counts and repeat 5 to 10 times.

### 3. Neck Relaxer:

**Purpose:** helps to relax the neck.



- Sit or stand with a straight back. Inhale. As you exhale, drop your head slowly to the left trying to touch your ear to your shoulder. Repeat on right. Bring head back to centre.
- Inhale, then exhale slowly and drop chin to chest. Inhaling, roll your right ear toward your right shoulder; exhale while bringing chin back toward chest. Repeat to the left.

### 4. Shoulder Roll:

**Purpose:** to relax the shoulder muscles.



- Inhaling, slowly raise your shoulders towards your ears, and roll them backward 5X in a circular motion. After 2 or 3 rotations, change directions and roll shoulders forward. Ensure you are breathing deeply each time.

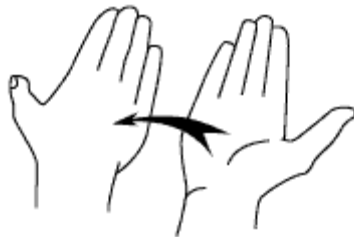


## Stretching the Hands & Forearms

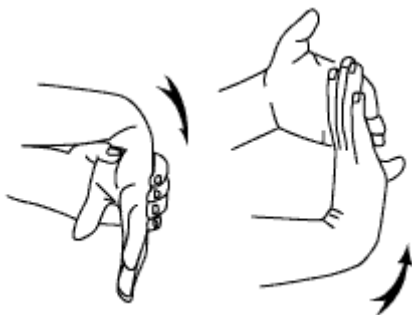
1. With hand open and facing down, gently bend wrist from side to side, as far as possible. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times.



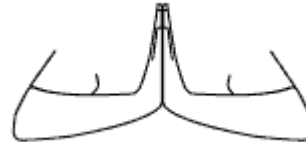
2. Start by stretching your arm and hand out and slowly rotate the wrist down until you feel a stretch. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Next, rotate the palm up until you feel a stretch. Repeat 3 times.



3. Grasp hand and hold fingers with the other hand. Slowly bend wrist down until you feel a stretch. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times. Then slowly bend your wrist up until you feel the stretch. Hold & relax.



4. Sitting with your elbows on the table and palms together, slowly lower wrists to the table until you feel a stretch (your elbows will move outward a bit). Be sure to keep your palms together throughout the stretch. Hold 5 to 7 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times.



5. a) Start with your hand open.



b) Make a fist. Keep your thumb straight, not tucked under your fingers.



c) Slide your finger tips up your palm so the tips of your fingers are near the base of your fingers and you should feel a stretch. Do not force your fingers with your other hand if something is painful.

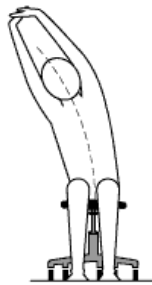




# Stretches for the Back

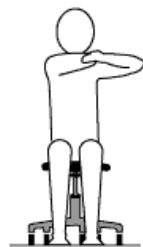
## 1. Back/Side Stretch:

- Interlace your fingers and lift your arms over your head, keeping the elbows straight. Press arms as far back as you can. To stretch your sides, slowly lean to the left and then to the right.



## 2. Middle/Upper Back Stretch:

- Hold your right arm with your left hand just above the elbow. Gently push your elbow toward your left shoulder. Hold stretch for 5 seconds. Repeat with your left arm.



## 3. Back Curl: (also stretches your legs)

- Grasp your shin. Lift the leg off the floor. Bend forward (curling your back), and reach your nose to your knee. Repeat with the other leg.



## 4. Upper Back Stretch: (Also helps stretch your arms, hands, fingers and shoulders)

- Sit or stand tall with your back straight. Interlock your fingers, palms up. Stretch arms above head until straight and hold for 20 seconds. Ensure your tummy muscles are tight and tucked in, and do not arch your back. Relax and repeat. Inhale and exhale with controlled breathing.



## 5. Standing Back Bends:

**Purpose:** Stretches the anterior trunk, hips and joints in the lower back.



- Place your hands in the small of your back and slowly bend backwards until you feel a gentle stretch in your trunk. Remember that stretching should not cause any pain. Hold the stretch for 3 seconds and repeat 10 times.



# Leg Stretches

**1. Ankle Flex and Stretch:** *(this will stretch & work your thigh muscles, ankles, and calf muscles)*

- Hold one foot off the floor with your leg straight. Alternately flex your ankle (point your toes up) and extend (point your toes down). Repeat with the other leg.



**2. Leg Lift:**

- Sit forward on the chair so that your back is not touching the chair's back. Place feet flat on the floor. With a straight leg, lift one foot a few inches off the floor. Hold momentarily, and return your foot to the floor. Repeat with the other leg.





## Stop and Smell the Roses!

***Try to take a relaxation break for a moment or two every so often throughout the day. We often get so tied up in our daily schedules that we forget to even take a deep breath, and as a result our muscles tense up.***

***Deep breathing provides extra oxygen to the blood which relaxes and reenergizes our muscles. It will also help to keep us mentally alert. Try it and see for yourself!***

### **1. Breathing Exercise:**

*(This will work your breathing and abdominal muscles.)*

- *Inhale* very slowly through your nose and make sure to expand your stomach muscles and allow the air to fill your lungs. Reverse as you *exhale*. Do this exercise for three to five minutes whenever you feel tense.

### **2. Relaxation Exercise:**

- Sit down in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Make tight fists, hold for five seconds then relax your hands. Do this three to four times. Try to be aware of the different sensations of tension and relaxation you are feeling.
- Repeat with all of your muscle groups: arms, shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, hips, thighs, lower legs and feet. At first, it may take about 20 minutes altogether. Contract and relax one muscle group at a time for a few minutes each throughout the day. With practice, you'll be able

to do all groups in about five minutes.

### **3. Resting Eye Muscles:**

*(This will reduce strain caused by looking constantly at the same object [E.g. computer terminal])*

- Give your eyes a rest from your surroundings by looking away for a few moments. Looking out the window or away from your computer and/or normal surroundings can ease & relax strained eyes.