

Yoga in the Office: A quick and effective stretch routine

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A full, luxurious hour of yoga -- be it in a class or with a DVD -- is like a cozy home-cooked meal or a relaxing dinner out at a favorite restaurant: a wonderful treat, but not always an option, especially on busy days. And just as we have to devise ways to grab our meals on the go or take our lunch at our desk when things get hectic, it's important to adapt our yoga and flexibility training to reflect the realities of our fast-paced schedules. Enter this Yoga in the Office sampler, a quick and simple rundown of effective positions, selected from the four different "office stretch" programs here at The Flexibility Coach, to help stretch the wrists, neck, shoulders, back and legs, to relieve pent-up tension and to promote increased well-being. Give it a try* and see if you don't feel immediate relief!



Abdominal Breathing: As simple as it seems, a few minutes of proper abdominal breathing can do much to interrupt your stress levels and help you relax. Sit up in neutral posture and place your hands on your abdomen. As you inhale, feel your abdomen expand like a balloon, then slowly contract your abdomen by "sucking" in your belly button as you exhale. Relax your shoulders. If possible, inhale through your nostrils, and exhale through pursed lips (think of the shape of your mouth when you're about to pronounce the letter "P"). Stop the exercise immediately if you feel at all light-headed (proper abdominal breathing should not cause this). When you inhale, try not to lift your shoulders; let the breath "move" into your stomach.

Not sure what these stretches and exercises look like?

Members of theflexibilitycoach.com can click on the hyperlink of each stretch and exercise and pull up a clear, detailed photo of the position for easy reference!



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Neck Stretches: Sit or stand tall, and gently lower your chin to relax the back of your neck. Be sure the rest of your body is still sitting or standing tall in neutral posture; the only area that is bent is your neck. After holding through 2-3 breaths, return upright to neutral posture,

then lower your right ear down towards your right shoulder. Hold, relaxing the left side of your neck thoroughly. Return upright and repeat on the other side. Finally, rotate your neck as far around towards the right as it feels comfortable, hold, then return to center and reverse.

Shoulder Shrugs: With your hands at your sides, lift your shoulders up towards your ears as you inhale, then release the shoulders back down as you exhale. Repeat: lift and tense the muscles of the shoulders and neck as you inhale, then relax them completely as you exhale. Repeat at least 4-6 times.

Wrist Stretches: Hold up one hand in front of you like you would when saying "stop." Interlace your fingers with your other hand and pull your fingers back gently to provide a stretch to your wrist. Relax your shoulders, and hold through at least four breaths. Now, change the position of your hand so that your fingers point downward, and the back of your hand faces away from you. Take hold of the back of your

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hand with your other hand and pull gently toward you to stretch the back of your wrist. Hold through at least four breaths, then perform both stretches on the other hand.

Chest Stretch: Place your hands behind your back, holding a scarf, belt, or necktie in between them. Stand up tall in neutral posture, and gently squeeze your shoulder blades towards the center of your back as though trying to squeeze a pencil. Each time you exhale, raise your arms slowly behind you, going as high as feels comfortable, but not so high that your neck or shoulder posture is compromised. Try to relax your neck, shoulders, and chest as you perform this. Repeat at least 4-6 times.

Lateral Side Stretch: If you have pre-existing back problems, check with your doctor before performing this position. Stand tall with your feet hip-distance apart. Raise one arm overhead, and as you exhale, begin a gentle lean to the other side. Be sure your chest continues to face forward, and that your arm remains all the way up; don't drop your arm in front of your face or let your upper body twist downward. Try to keep your top arm fully stretched; avoid bending the elbow. Relax your shoulders and waist. Hold through two breaths, come up and repeat on the other side. Then start over; work up to a total of 4-8 repetitions.

Standing Spinal Twist: Stand next to a wall, with your right hip and shoulder pointing towards the wall, your right foot in front of your left foot, toes pointing straight ahead. Turn towards the wall and place your hands on it, at about the height of your chest. Keep your spine aligned; that is, do not lean forward or back. Pressing your hands into the wall, gently twist your upper body until you feel a comfortable but distinct stretch/twist in your back. Make sure your weight remains evenly distributed on both feet; do not raise either heel. Hold the position through three breaths as you consciously try to relax your shoulders, lightly contract your abdomen, and relax your back. Return back around, turn the other way, switch legs and perform the other side.

Seated Hip Stretch: If you have concerns regarding your knee, check with your doctor before attempting this position. Sitting in a chair, cross your right leg on top of your left leg so that your right ankle is just above your left knee. Point your right leg as far out to the side as possible. Place your right hand on your right knee, and your left hand on your right foot. Gently, sink your chest forward over your right lower leg; go as far forward as you comfortably can, and hold the position through at least four breaths. Relax your low back, shoulders, and hip muscles. Slowly return upright and repeat on the other side.

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