

Computer Stretches

No one is immune to computer fatigue. If you've spent any length of time working on a computer you will probably recognize at least some of the following symptoms: eye-strain, backache, tight and/or sore shoulder muscles, hand soreness, aches and soreness in underused buttock and thigh muscles. Here are some things you can do, while you are using your computer, to help alleviate and avoid these energy-robbing aches and strains.

1. Eyestrain – This is very important. Your eyes need to be exercised just like muscles. Look away from the computer screen every 30-45 minutes. Focus on the farthest object available. Choose a tree or building or sign, any stationary object that maximally stretches your visual focus. When you feel your eyes have adjusted (3-5 seconds), focus on another object that is midway between the object you just focused on and your computer screen. Once your eyes have adjusted to that object, look at your computer screen or another close object for a few seconds. Repeat the sequence – focus on farthest object, midway object, close up object. Stare at each point long enough for your eyes to become comfortable. If you do not have a window in your workspace, then use the space you have or walk to where you have a longer view. This is a great exercise to do while you are on the phone, waiting for a program to load, while doing Internet searches, or waiting for a document to print.

2. Tight and/or sore shoulder muscles – often this is the result of posture while typing. Do you slump? (Strengthening abdominal muscles often helps straighten posture, as those muscles help support your back). Do you raise your wrist when you type? (Catch yourself. Then let your wrists drop. They should rest on a pad while you type). Computer fatigue can create energy-robbing stress in your body. Try this – Pull your shoulders straight up towards your ears, hold them there for 5 seconds then let them drop. Repeat this but hold your shoulders up for only 2-3 seconds before relaxing them. You can use a little visualization with this if you need extra relaxation. Breathe in deeply as you bring your shoulders up, invite all the tension in your body to rise to your shoulders with your breath, see or feel this happening. Imagine the tension being carried out of your body through your shoulders, down your arms (especially your right arm) as you slowly exhale. This exercise is very effective and becomes easier and even more effective with practice.

3. Hand soreness – Excessive and repetitive use of those typing and mouse-clicking fingers can result in overall hand soreness. Remember to stretch – often! Picture a cat stretching her arms and extending her claws. Follow the “shoulder tension release” exercise described above with a cat-like stretch of the arms and hands. Then massage the pad of your hand under each thumb. Use your thumb and massage the palm of the opposite hand using small circular motions. Now, starting with thumb at bottom of palm, press thumb into hand and move it smoothly towards each finger, including thumb. This is great for stimulating circulation in your hands to keep them warm and supple. By far the best thing I have found is those

Chinese “chee-gung” hand balls. They are widely available, fairly inexpensive and usually come in an attractive box that will look great on your desk. Hold both balls in your palm and roll them around your hand. Use a counterclockwise direction for the right hand and a clockwise direction for the left hand. With practice you will be able to roll them around and get a smooth humming sound. This activity is purported to have many beneficial effects and are used to strengthen hands, improve circulation to hands and fingers, and prevent arthritis and rheumatism in arm and shoulder joints. Perhaps today we can add “prevention of computer fatigue” to the list of traditional benefits.

4. Thighs and buttocks – those neglected, underused muscles! They get sore and slack from sitting for lengths of time. The good news is that you can stay in shape, even when your work requires many hours at the computer. Keep a “Buttmaster tm” under your desk. Use it frequently for short periods of time throughout the day. It doesn’t require your attention and it leaves your hands free to type. It does tone those neglected muscles! Instead of sitting while you wait for a document to print or a program to load, stand up and do some deep knee bends. Stand and breathe in deeply. As you exhale, bring one knee up and as close to your chest as you can. This will stretch and tone those sitting muscles. While sitting in your chair, bend over, relax your head and let your arms hang limp beside your legs. Inhale as you come up slowly, rising from the base of your spine upwards, bringing your head up last.

Double-duty your time with these simple moves and you will avoid computer fatigue. These are all exercises that can be performed right at your computer, and easily integrated into your normal computer activities. Put it into your consciousness that you will make these a part of your day. Recognize when you have those useable moments – while printing, searching the web, on “hold”.

Computer fatigue does not have to be a part of your work experience. Use these exercises and you will be alleviating and then eliminating computer fatigue from your life. Don’t be surprised if you find yourself feeling more relaxed and alert after work than usual. Happy computing!

1. **Get up and walk around!** Take a 1 minute break from the computer every 30 minutes, and a 5 minute break every couple of hours. Go to the water cooler and catch up on office gossip.
2. **Learn the keyboard commands.** Try to remember commands such as "Ctrl A" to mark text. Avoiding the mouse will preserve your wrist and forearm.
3. **Don't cradle the phone with your neck.** If you're right-handed, put the phone on the left side of the desk so you hold the handset with your left hand and take notes with your right.
4. **Keep the screen clean.** Dusting it off once a week will relieve eye strain.
5. **If it hurts, don't do it.** Pay attention to your body. If your wrist aches, print out so you can get away from the computer.
6. **Have your eyes examined regularly.** Staring over a hot CRT only exacerbates improperly corrected vision.
7. **Change your gear.** From time to time, switch to different keyboards and pointing devices. The more variety you put into your computer work the better.
8. **Be kind to your mouse.** By using a light grip, you won't tense the muscles and tendons in your arm.
9. **Keep warm.** Colder muscles and tendons appear to be more susceptible to RSI.
10. **Is it just your office?** Repetitive activities such as playing a musical instrument can cause RSI. You might have to make some changes outside of work.

How to Stretch

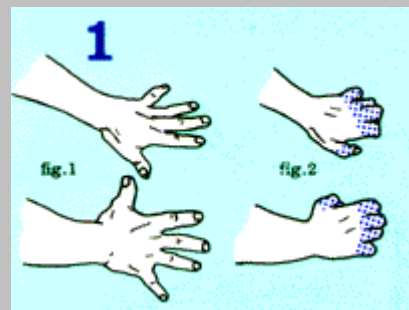
Stretching should be done slowly without bouncing. Stretch to where you feel a slight, easy stretch. Hold this feeling for 5-20 seconds. As you hold this stretch, the feeling of tension should diminish. If it doesn't, just ease off slightly into a more comfortable stretch. The easy stretch reduces tension and readies the tissues for the developmental stretch.

After holding the easy stretch, you can move a fraction of an inch farther into the stretch until you feel mild tension again. This is the developmental stretch which should be held for 10-15 seconds. This feeling of stretch tension should also slightly diminish or stay the same. If the tension increases or becomes painful, you are overstretching. Ease off a bit to a comfortable stretch. The developmental stretch reduces tension and will safely increase flexibility.

Hold only stretch tensions that feel good to you. The key to stretching is to be relaxed while you concentrate on the area being stretched. Your breathing should be slow, deep and rhythmical. Don't worry about how far you can stretch, stretch relaxed and limberness will become just one of the many byproducts of regular stretching.

*****NOTE: If you have had any recent surgery, muscle, or joint problem, please consult your personal health care professional before starting a stretching or exercise program.***

Separate and straighten your fingers until tension of a stretch is felt (fig. 1). Hold for 10 seconds. Relax, then bend your fingers at the knuckles and hold for 10 seconds (fig. 2). Repeat stretch in fig. 1 once more.



This stretch may cause people around you to think you are very strange, indeed, but you often find a lot of tension in your face from eye strain. Raise your eyebrows and open your eyes as wide as possible. At the same time, open your mouth to stretch the muscles around your nose and chin and stick your tongue out. Hold this stretch for 5-10 seconds. **Caution: If you have clicking or popping noises when opening mouth, check with your dentist before doing this stretch.**



Shoulder Shrug: Raise the top of your shoulders toward your ears until you feel slight tension in your neck and shoulders. Hold this feeling of tension for 3-5 seconds, then relax your shoulders downward into their normal position. Do this 2-3 times. Good to use at the first signs of tightness or tension in the shoulder and neck area.



With fingers interlaced behind head, keep elbows straight out to side with upper body in a good aligned position. Now pull your shoulder blades toward each other to create a feeling of tension through upper back and shoulder blades. Hold this feeling of mild tension for 8-10 seconds, then relax. Do several times. This is good to do when shoulders and upper back are tense or tight.



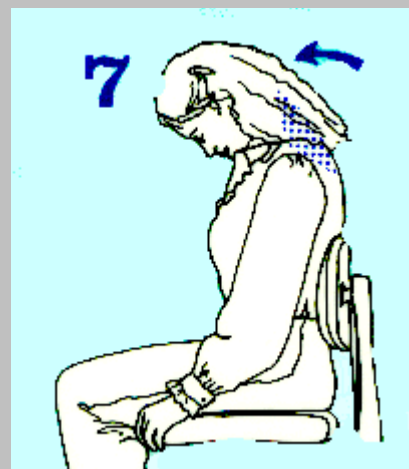
Start with head in a comfortable, aligned position. Slowly tilt head to left side to stretch muscles on side of neck. Hold stretch for 10-20 seconds. Feel a good, even stretch. Do not overstretch. Then tilt head to right side and stretch. Do 2-3 times to each side.



From a stable, aligned position turn your chin toward your left shoulder to create a stretch on the right side of your neck. Hold right stretch tensions for 10-20 seconds. Do each side twice.



Gently tilt your head forward to stretch the back of the neck. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times. Hold only tensions that feel good. Do not stretch to the point of pain.



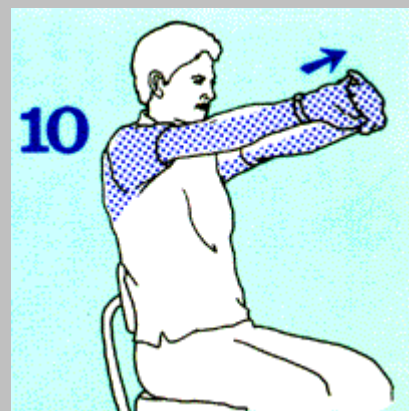
REPEAT STRETCH #3

8
Repeat stretch #3

Hold your left arm just above the elbow with the right hand. Now gently pull elbow toward opposite shoulder as you look over your left shoulder. Hold stretch for 15-20 seconds. Do both sides.



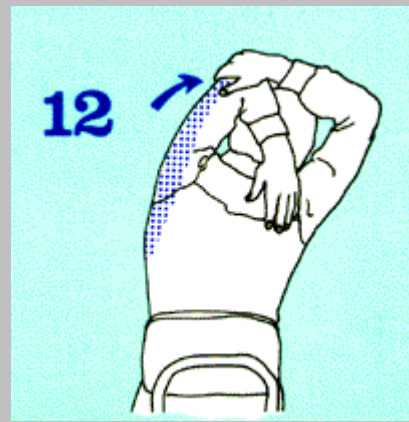
Interlace fingers, then straighten arms out in front of you. The palms should be facing away from you as you do the stretch. Feel stretch in arms and through the upper part of the back (shoulder blades). Hold stretch for 20-30 seconds. Do at least two times.



Interlace fingers then turn palms upwards above your head as you straighten your arms. Think of elongating your arms as you feel a stretch through arms and upper sides of rib cage. Hold for 10-20 seconds. Hold only stretches that feel releasing. Do three times.



Hold left elbow with right hand, then gently pull elbow behind head until an easy tension-stretch is felt in shoulder or back of upper arm (triceps). Hold easy stretch for 30 seconds. Do not overstretch. Do both sides.



Hold onto your lower leg just below the knee. Gently pull bent leg toward your chest. To isolate a stretch in the side of your upper leg, use the right arm to pull bent leg across and toward the opposite shoulder. Hold for 30 seconds at easy stretch tension. Do both sides



A stretch for the side of hip, lower and middle of back. Sit with left leg bent over right leg, then rest elbow or forearm of right arm on the outside of the upper thigh of the left leg. Now apply some controlled, steady pressure toward the right with the elbow or forearm. As you do this look over your left shoulder to get the stretch feeling. Do both sides. Hold for 15 seconds.



The next stretch is done with fingers interlaced behind your back. Slowly turn your elbows inward while straightening your arms. An excellent stretch for shoulders and arms. This is good to do when you find yourself slumping forward from your shoulders. This stretch can be done at any time. Hold for 5-15 seconds. Do twice.



To stretch your calf, stand a little ways from a solid support and lean on it with your forearms, your head resting on your hands. Bend one leg and place your foot on the floor in front of you leaving the other leg straight, behind you. Slowly move your hips forward until you feel a stretch in the calf of your straight leg. Be sure to keep the heel of the foot of the straight leg on the floor and **your toes pointed straight ahead**. Hold an easy stretch for 30 seconds. Do not bounce. Stretch both legs.



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