

Yoga at your Desk Exercises

1) The Shoulder workout

- a) Sitting or standing, interlink your fingers and stretch your arms vertically above your head. Slightly lower your chin towards your chest and breathe slow and deep into your side ribs.
- b) Lower your arms to a horizontal position. Feel that your arms are being stretched in opposite directions. Work all your muscles and continue breathing slowly and deeply.
- c) Place your hands in the prayer position behind your spine and try to press your palms together. Focus your mind and imagine that your breath moves into the shoulder blades.
- d) If you cannot place the hands in prayer position then catch hold of your elbows or even forearms. Again, breathe into the shoulder blades.

HOLD EACH STAGE FOR 30-60 SECONDS

Benefits: This sequence of poses creates freedom and release in that most common reservoir of tension- the shoulders.

2) The Spinal Twist

- a) Sit on a chair facing forwards with your feet flat on the floor about a foot apart.
- b) Keeping the legs in exactly the same position, turn your torso to the right and grab the rear of the chair as shown, lifting upwards from the lower belly. Try to keep the hands high up the sides of the chair.
You should feel a strong stretch through the right side of the torso. (Keep lifting from the base of the spine and) try to relax the shoulders and arms as much as possible so that the effort is felt only in the torso.
Make sure that the breathing does not quicken.
- c) After 30-45 seconds, turn to face the front and then take the pose on the left side. Repeat twice on each side if possible.

Benefits: This pose is the perfect antidote to the compression of the spine that occurs unnoticed, when we spend all day sitting and slouching at our desks. Over time it builds strength in the lower back-allowing one to sit upright with little effort. Repeat at least twice a day and you should feel immediately invigorated at your workstation.

3) Neck stretch

a) Sit upright and catch hold of the sides of the chair.

b) Slowly stretch the chest up and lower the neck and head back in a controlled manner-making sure that you stay within your own comfort zone. (The neck is a vulnerable part of the body so do not over- exert.)

Hold the pose for 5-10 breaths, breathing evenly and maintaining length through the neck muscles.

c) Slowly straighten the spine and sit for a moment with the head absolutely straight and still, becoming aware of all the sensations in your upper body.

Benefits: This pose creates the reverse action in the neck and head to the usual “typing position” and is thus essential in preventing a long-term habit of poor posture and compressed neck vertebrae from developing.

4) The “Desk Stretch ” / Back stretch

a) Stand with your legs absolutely straight hip distance apart, 2-3 feet away from your desk.

b) Lean forwards and place your palms 18 inches apart on your desk keeping the arms straight. Stretch your spine in two opposite directions:- up into the head and down into the base of your spine. Visualise spaces emerging in between the vertebrae of the spine and breathe slowly, deeply and evenly.

c) After holding for 30-60 seconds, slowly lift your head and step forwards towards your desk to come up. Stand upright for a few seconds (to let the blood flow back down).

Benefits: This a “whole body” pose which stretches numerous muscle groups: Calf, thigh, back and arm muscles are worked and the abdominal organs are toned through the lengthening process. As with all the exercises this week, it reverses the postural slump caused by being deskbound.

Additional Information: “Workstation Workouts” with The Lotus Exchange

In the last 25 years, Computers have modernised and revolutionised our lives- bringing people, products, services and information together in ways only previously imagined by science fiction. However, these instruments of technological advancement have taken their toll on their human operators. The human body was never designed to sit still, with only the fingers, eyes and neck moving whilst the spine remains static. This “computer posture” is a recipe for a host of physical and energetic ailments. Doctors and Physiotherapists report increasing numbers of people coming to them with the same problems: repetitive strain injury, neck and shoulder tension, back ache and poor, shallow breathing to name but a few. According to the Harley Street Back Centre, 119 million working days a year are lost to back problems. That’s a staggering figure.

However, computers are not the only cause of unease in the workplace. Sitting still for most of the day makes one’s energy stagnate leading to feelings of lethargy and sluggishness.

-Fluorescent lights, mobile phones as well as computers increase the amount of unfriendly radiation in the working environment depleting the body’s immune system. Add to this the normal incidence of high pressure deadlines, conflict with co-workers, frustration with difficult customers and negotiating public transport and the roads before or after work- it comes as no surprise that work related stress never lets up.

The Lotus Exchange is an organisation that uses yogic techniques to transform tension and fatigue in the workplace into alertness, stamina and greater productivity.

Ailon Freedman recommends the following programme of office yoga poses to take the edge off the tension and stimulate the body’s vitality. Each day’s exercise will take no more than 2-3 minutes... if you can practise the entire routine even once or twice a day or a single exercise every hour, then changes in your energy level at work should be felt. And if you are able to run full yoga sessions in your workplace the benefits that can occur include less back pain, improved immunity and thus less sick days lost; improved self esteem and stronger team bonds as well as quicker response times, better problem solving skills and more happiness.

3 This downloadable activity has been donated by the Lotus Exchange for Learning at Work Day. The Lotus Exchange also run on-site yoga, desk yoga and well-being sessions in your workplace. Visit www.lotus-exchange.com for more information.

The benefits of yoga in the office **Less sick days lost** Yoga revitalises the immune system and the major organs of the body, removing waste products such as alcohol up to three times more quickly. Improved immunity means less work days are lost through colds, fatigue and other non-specific illnesses.

Less back pain *119 million working days are lost due to back pain each year in the UK. The stronger, healthier backs that result from a regular yoga practice will significantly reduce the number of days missed in your company. Count them. * Harley Street Back Centre

Better problem solving skills Yoga harmonises the left and right sides of the brain so that logical and creative thought come together as one. Flashes of inspiration should become increasingly common.

Quicker response time By training you in the art of single pointedness, yoga immediately improves mental concentration and focus.

The ability to Stay Cool Stress is like an enclosing wall all around us. Yogic deep breathing and yoga stretches create a genuine sense of inner and outer space. Tightening deadlines, interpersonal conflict and other stresses will lose their grip as you learn to breathe and stand your ground.

The Happiness Factor Yoga physiologically transforms apathy and depression by oxygenating the brain and increasing the level of endorphins in the blood.

Energy and Vitality Yoga awakens hidden reserves of energy within your nervous, endocrine and cardio-vascular systems so that lethargy and fatigue are replaced by alertness and aliveness.

Improved Self Esteem People work better when they feel good about themselves. By executing demanding physical yoga postures, your confidence will grow - even after your first class.

Stronger Team Bonds Taking yoga classes together is a way to build better communication and trust between members of a team and even have fun.