

Stretch Breaks - Quick, Easy, and Essential

Did you know that stretching helps prevent musculoskeletal disorders? It's true, and the Japanese have known it for years. Employees in many Japanese workplaces begin every day with a group stretch led by a supervisor. In just minutes a day, a few simple exercises that stretch muscles and tendons can put an end to many of those costly workplace sprains, strains, and pains.

Use the following quick and easy head-to-toe stretching exercises before you start work—and periodically during the day—to keep your body flexible and your muscles relaxed while you work.

Neck stretches:

- Lower head toward the chest, stretch neck gently, and raise head slowly.
- Turn head gently from side to side.
- Tilt head slowly first toward one shoulder, then the other, then backward.

Shoulder stretches:

- Shrug shoulders and roll them forward and back.
- With elbows out, move arms back to bring shoulder blades together.
- Reach arms overhead, stretch, and bend gently from side to side.

Arm and wrist stretches:

- Place arms out in front of body. Lace fingers together and rotate hands so that palms are facing out. Straighten elbows and push palms gently away from body for a few seconds.
- Place arms out in front of body. Turn wrists so that palms turn out. Then turn wrists back so that palms turn in.
- Place arms out in front of body. Bend wrists up so that palms face out and hold for a few seconds. Then bend wrist down so that palms face in and hold for a few seconds.

Hand stretches:

- Make a fist and then extend and stretch your fingers.
- Touch thumb to little finger and hold for a few seconds.

Lower back stretches:

- Stand with knees slightly bent and place hands on lower back just above hips. Gently bend backwards (just a little!).

Leg stretches:

- Sit in a chair, raise each leg in turn out in front (parallel to the floor), and hold for a few seconds. Then alternate.

Why It Matters...

- *The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported over half a million workplace sprains, strains, and tears in one recent year.*
- *Collectively, U.S. employers shell out billions of dollars every year in medical costs, disability payments, and lost productivity because of workplace musculoskeletal disorders.*
- *The most common injuries affect the back and trunk, followed by arms, hands, legs, and feet.*
- *Simple stretching exercises performed before work and periodically during the day can prevent many of these injuries.*

When we share the responsibility for safety in the workplace, everyone wins!!