Stretches for Workers

INTRODUCTION

Before beginning any stretching program, check with your healthcare provider. If you question any of the following stretches, or feel any discomfort while doing any of these stretches, stop and check with your healthcare provider before continuing. You may notice that working at a computer for long periods of time, without taking a short break, may cause you to feel some discomfort. When you first feel discomfort, stop what you are doing and take a few minutes to do the stretches described in this pamphlet. Each of these stretches focuses on a specific part of the body – the neck and shoulders, the elbows, the forearms, and the hands and wrists. Each stretch should be done **s-l-o-w-l-y** and gently. The benefits are well worth the few minutes it takes out of your workday.

TRUNK AND LOW BACK

SIDE BEND

- Feet shoulder width apart, arms at sides.
- With one hand, reach up overhead and **s-l-o-w-l-y** lean towards opposite side. Keep both feet flat on ground.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds.
- Return to starting position and repeat twice on EACH SIDE.

BACKBEND

- Feet shoulder width apart, hands on hips.
- Looking straight ahead (don’t throw your head back) **s-l-o-w-l-y** and gently bend backwards.
- Caution – You should feel tension, not pain, in the low back.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds, but don’t hold your breath.
- Return to starting position and repeat three times.

SHOULDERS

CHEST AND SHOULDER STRETCH

This is a good stretch that you can do any time during your day. Most of us sit “hunched” over our computers or other paperwork. This stretch pulls your shoulders back and stretches your chest muscles, helping to relieve muscle tensions resulting from sitting in a “hunched” position.

Standing up straight, raise your arms with your elbows bent so that your upper arms are parallel to the floor, fingers pointing up.

- **S-l-o-w-l-y** squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for 3-5 seconds.
- Return to the starting position and repeat three times.

HEAD & NECK

NECK GLIDE

Sitting upright in your chair, with your ears positioned over your shoulders, focus on an object at eye level within your work area.

- Continue focusing on this object and **s-l-o-w-l-y** pull your chin straight back about half way. If you begin to look up at the ceiling, you are tilting your head backwards. If this happens, go back to neutral and refocus on the object you choose.
- Put your index finger on your chin and **s-l-o-w-l-y** and gently push and glide the head back and hold for a count of five. You should feel a gentle stretch in the muscles at the back of your neck.
- Keep looking at your object and s-l-o-w-l-y return back to neutral.
- Repeat this stretch three times.

LEGS

HAMSTRING STRETCH

- Raise your foot on an elevated surface, at least 10” to 12” high. A step stool or the bottom shelf of a locked rolling cart works.
- Looking forward, **s-l-o-w-l-y** bend at hip, keeping raised leg straight.
- Stop when you feel tension and hold 3-5 seconds.
- To increase tension, pull toes towards face.
- Switch legs and repeat stretch. Do each leg twice.

QUADRICEPS STRETCH

- Holding on for balance with your right hand, grab your left foot or ankle with your left hand.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds and feel the pull in the front of your thigh.
- Repeat on opposite side. Do each leg twice.

ARMS & WRISTS

FOREARM STRETCH #1

This is a good stretch for those muscles and tendons that run along the inside of the forearm. This stretch can be done either standing or sitting.

- Put the heels of your hands together with your fingers pointing towards the ceiling, forearms parallel to the floor.
- Keeping your hands together, **s-l-o-w-l-y** and gently lower the heels of your hands down slightly.
- Hold for a count of five. Bring your hands back up to the starting position.
- Repeat this stretch three times.

THUMB STRETCH

This is a good stretch for computer users who feel discomfort along the top of the thumb.

- Hold your arms out straight in front of you with your palms facing up.
- Put your thumb into the base of your palm and cover your thumb with fingers.
- Rotate your fists a quarter turn towards each other.
- S-l-o-w-l-y and gently rotate the hands down toward the floor.
- Hold for a count of five. You should feel a gentle stretch from the topside of the thumb to the wrist.
- Relax and shake out your hands and arms.
- Repeat this stretch three times.

OPEN HAND STRETCH

- Start with your hands in a loose fist position.
- **S-l-o-w-l-y** open your hands and extend your fingers.
- Return to a loose fist position and repeat three times.

FOREARM STRETCH #2

This is a good stretch for those muscles and tendons that run along the top of the forearm. This stretch can be done either standing or sitting.

- Hold your arms out straight in front of you with your palms facing down.
- Make a loose fist with your hands.
- **S-l-o-w-l-y** and gently bend your fists down towards the floor. Your knuckles should be pointing towards the floor.
- Now **s-l-o-w-l-y** and gently rotate your fists toward the little finger side of your hand.
- Hold for 3-5 seconds. You should feel a stretch from the topside of the wrists up to the elbow.
- Relax and shake out your hands and arms.
- Repeat this stretch three times.

FINGER PULL

This is also a good stretch for muscles and tendons that run along the inside of the forearm. This stretch can be done either standing or sitting.

- Hold one arm straight out in front of you, palm down.
- Bend your wrist, fingers pointing towards the ceiling.
- With other hand grasping the entire four fingers of the outstretched hand, **s-l-o-w-l-y** and gently pull the four fingers backwards until you feel a gentle stretch up inside the forearm to the elbow.
- Hold for a count of five.
- Release the fingers and shake out your hand and arm.
- Change hands and repeat the stretch.
- Do each hand three times.