SOMATIC STRETCH®
WORKDAY EXERCISE SERIES
FOR HOME OR OFFICE

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The exercises in this program are to be done slowly and mindfully. They may cause some discomfort, however, when done as instructed they should cause no injury. Notwithstanding, not all exercises are suitable for every person, and this, or any other exercise program, may result in injury. If you are unsure whether this program is suitable for you, consult with your doctor or health care provider before proceeding, especially if you are elderly or have any chronic or recurring condition.

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Principles of Correct Stretching

Stretching, more often than not, is done with a goal in mind: Your toes, your knees, somewhere out there ‘at the end of the stretch.’

While this type of stretching increases circulation, bringing more blood to the muscles, it doesn’t allow them enough time to fully elongate, and a forceful stretch in this manner can also lead to muscle strain as the body’s protective mechanism is overpowered.

This protective mechanism and natural physiological response is known as a ‘stretch reflex’; and it works in keeping with the well-known law of physics that, “every action has an equal and opposite reaction.”

Each time a part of the body is stretched, muscle fibers lengthen while other muscle fibers contract in order to prevent over-extension and injury. For example, in stretching your biceps a high number of fibers within the biceps will elongate while a high number of other fibers within the same biceps muscle will simultaneously contract. This combined effort helps to prevent injury as the contraction holds us back from ‘pushing too far’, although if we focus on a ‘goal’ and insist upon obtaining it, we can still strain the muscle.

However, when we allow ourselves to slowly relax our whole body and focus on our breathing, the stretch reflex reacts less strongly. The gentle stretch assures the body that we are not going to try to pull too much too soon and the protective contraction eases up. The resulting stretches are deeper and more complete, allowing for progressively more elongation of the muscles. This also causes more blood to be drawn into the area, much like fluid is slowly drawn into a syringe. In this way, inflexible or painful areas can then receive a more adequate supply of oxygen and vital nutrients, making them healthier and stronger. This focus on working with the stretch reflex is how Somatic Stretch differs from most other stretch techniques.

The following points list some of the many benefits to be had from this slow, relaxed way of stretching:

• Improved blood flow strengthens and tones muscles.
• Injuries heal more quickly, minimizing trauma.
• Joints become more resilient, which helps prevent injuries.
• Range of motion and posture improves, helping to reduce or prevent many aches and pains common to poor posture or ‘aging.’
• Increased flexibility develops body awareness, creating a stronger connection between mind and body. Daily movements become more grounded and fluid.
Energy previously trapped in tight muscles is now free to be used to keep physiological functions healthy, for physical activities, to enhance mood, and to generate vitality.

On their own, the exercises in this booklet provide an effective stretching session that can be used by anyone regardless of their level of flexibility.

As a complement to sports or other activities, they help prevent injuries, improve performance, and provide the needed counterbalance to muscle-contracting exercise.

When working with these stretches, don’t be concerned about reaching the ‘end goal’ of a stretch. Instead, while staying passively relaxed, notice where they affect you, and to what extent. The line the stretch reflex helps us notice - between relaxation and active muscle use - is difficult to discern at first, but it becomes recognizable as tension drops away and as more ‘sensation’ is experienced.

Some areas may be tighter than you expected and it’s especially here that just letting the muscles relax will avoid injury as well as help minimize the sensation of pain. Here also it’s important to recognize the difference between good pain and bad pain. A ‘good’ pain is one you can handle and breathe into; you are still within the range of safety. A ‘bad’ pain is sharp and makes you tense up or ‘jump’ and hold your breath. This is a warning signal that you’ve reached a limit and should not press into it any further. Or possibly that there is a problem that should be looked into by a health professional. In that case, it’s best to avoid the exercise causing that type of pain until given the ‘all-clear.’ Any area that has been injured also needs caution and special care taken when working into it.

Remember, do not ‘reach’ for the stretch. Relax into it and breathe deeply without thinking of where you ‘should’ be. The more you practice, the more comfortable and effective these exercises will become.

This workbook is designed for use at the office or anytime you may find yourself at a desk for long periods of time. There are seventeen easy-to-follow exercises that target the upper body tension that can lead to carpal tunnel and repetitive strain injuries, as well as some general low back and leg stretches to help with mobility while reducing aches and pains.

At the back of the booklet you will find an overview of the exercises that can be used for easy reference once you are familiar with the stretches. You may even want to have that last page printed out to keep at your desk to remind you to fit in a stretch here and there!

Be sure to contact your doctor if you are experiencing acute or chronic pain, and do not continue with this or any other exercise program unless recommended by your health care professional.

For further information on Somatic Stretch®, you can visit our website at www.somaticstretch.com
1. Take a deep breath in, lifting your shoulders up to your ears, filling your whole body with air.
   Slowly exhale letting your shoulders drop in time with your breath so that your shoulders are fully relaxed only when you have completely finished breathing out.
   4 times.

2. Slowly let your chin drop down to your chest. Feel the weight of your head, and after some time, begin to ‘slouch’ so that your spine curves and the stretch moves further down your back.
   Without ‘lifting’ your head, slowly move it from one side to the other, letting the stretch open with the movement.
   Bring your head back to centre and gently roll head up.

3. (a) Sitting up in chair, exhale as you draw elbows back and press through the chest while keeping your shoulders down.
   Release and inhale before moving to the next movement.
   (b) Exhale as you press out through your back, elbows pressing forward and keeping your shoulders down.
   Breathe in as you release and exhale as you return to the above exercise. Repeat this whole exercise 6 times.
   (c) Continue by lifting your elbows and drawing large circles back down to your sides. Press out through your back as you draw your elbows back up again.
   Repeat 6 times.
4. (a) Sitting in a chair, place your hands at your shoulders (to keep the joints open and not slouching forward), gently pull your right elbow down and lean your head away from your right shoulder. Do not lift or pull your head. If your shoulder is held down by your elbow, a gentle lean of the head is the best way to stretch out tight neck muscles.

Come back to centre, releasing the hold of the elbow, and change sides.
Repeat 4 times.

(b) Repeat this exercise again, but this time as your head leans to the side, gently lift up under your chin to increase the stretch down the front of the neck.

Roll your head down to centre so that your chin is in the middle of your chest, and roll up the other side to do the same stretch, making sure you keep the shoulder pressed down that you are rolling away from.

Roll side to side, 4 times.

5. With hands clasped behind your back, pull hands towards the floor as your head pulls gently down toward your feet.

Release and breathe in.

4 times.

6. Press legs out to the side with both hands and lean forward into your hips.

In this position you can lean one shoulder forward after the other to increase the stretch if you wish.

7. With one leg stretched out, circle your ankle in one direction and then the other.

Change legs.
8. (a) Press the toes of your right foot over against the floor, keeping the heel behind the ankle. Then lift the foot and press down into the base of the second toe. 3 times. The last time, press down through the foot until the heel is on the floor. Tighten the thigh and buttock and shift your weight onto the ball of the foot with the heel light. Repeat with the left foot.

(b) With your right heel forward on the floor, squeeze the toes in tightly, then release. 4 times with each foot.

(c) With your right foot forward off the floor, curl the toes in, press the foot over, pull the toes up, and pull the foot back at the ankle. (On 4 counts) 4 times with each foot.

With the ball of the right foot on the floor and the heel lifted, press through the ball of the foot in a circular motion, keeping the pressure against the floor. 4 times outward, then 4 times inward. Repeat with the left foot.

With your right foot forward off the floor, make large, slow circles with your big toe, rotating the ankle. 4 times outward, then 4 times inward. Repeat with the left foot.
9. (a) With hands clasped behind your head, lift the right elbow up, stretching along the sides of the ribs.
Back to centre, repeat from side to side 4 times.
(b) Inhale, keeping both hands clasped behind the head, and exhale, pulling elbows back to open the shoulders and chest.
Release, breathing in to begin again. Repeat 4 times.
(c) Take a breath in and exhale as you draw your lower abdominal muscles in, turning your ribcage to the right.
Release as you breathe in and repeat to other side. 4 times.

10. (a) Take a deep breath in, lifting your shoulders to your ears and picking up your ribcage as much as possible.
(b) Breathing out, pull your hands back at the wrists, press your shoulders down, tighten your arms, and raise them slowly to both sides until you feel the stretch.
Lower your arms slowly, keeping the wrists bent until your arms are at your sides, then relax your arms and hands. Repeat from above, 4 times. The last time, hold your arms out for longer. When you relax them down, feel the “water dropping off your fingers.”
11. Straighten one arm out to the side, shoulder-height.
   Turn the hand and arm over, rolling the shoulder joint forward, then tighten the elbow to contract the muscles in the upper arm.
   Lift the shoulder a little to rotate the arm back. Repeat with the other arm. Four times with each arm, alternating sides.

12. Take a breath in. Breathing out, press your shoulders down and your upper arms forward. Hold for a moment, then release, breathing in. 4 times.
   Letting your breath out, press your upper arms forward, then pull your shoulders strongly forward. Release, and breathe in. 4 times.

13. (a) Pull your elbows and shoulders in towards each other, opening as much as possible between the shoulder blades.
   (b) Reverse the movement by trying to touch your elbows behind your back, making sure you keep your shoulders pressed down as well.
   From the above exercise, 4 times.
14. (a) Make a tight fist with each hand, then stretch your fingers wide. 4 times. Then shake your hands loosely.

(b) Bring your fingertips together and make slow outward circles with your hands, pulling your fingers down, then opening them as your hands lift up. Then circle your hands the other way. 4 times each way.

(c) With your palms facing forward, pull the fingertips down, then pull your hands back at the wrists, fingers relaxed. 4 times. Then shake out your arms.

(d) With your elbows bent to both sides, grasp the fingers of your left hand and press them back. Then release. Twice with each hand.

(e) With your elbows bent to both sides, place the palm of your right hand against the base of your left thumb and press the thumb back from its base, just above the wrist. Twice with each hand.

(f) With your elbows bent to both sides, place the heel of your right hand against the palm of the left hand, then press the hand gently back at the wrist. Twice with each hand, changing hands each time.

“Work the fingers.”
15. Take a deep breath in as you raise your arms straight up from your shoulders.

Holding your breath, pull your arms and shoulders strongly up to lift your rib-cage out of your hips. Tighten your thighs, and press the bottom of your pelvis forward.

Lower your shoulders as you let your breath out, leaving your arms up, relaxed. Breathe in again and repeat 3 times.

16. With your right knee over your right ankle, lean your body weight forward to stretch through the left leg. Keep your seat tightened and pressing forward on the left side and the left thigh slightly tightened.

Release and repeat 4 times each side.

17. (a) Draw your abdominals in and lower your head over your chest. Bend your knees slightly, then slowly roll down through your spine to hang over your waist. Let your arms hang from your shoulders. Stay for a few moments.

(b) Bend your right knee more and straighten your left leg, tipping the right hip down. Then reverse the legs and tip the left hip down. (Keep the body centred.) Twice each side.

Repeat Step 2, this time, taking your head and arms to the right so they hang past your bent knee. Bring your body slowly across centre and hang to the left. Twice to each side.

(c) Bring your body back to centre, bring your hips forward over your feet, and roll slowly up through your spine.

(d) Take a deep breath in as you open your elbows to both sides. Breathing out, press your shoulders down, arms back, and chest forward, contracting your shoulder-blades Lower your elbows and circle your shoulders.
WORKDAY EXERCISES GRAPHIC OVERVIEW

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