



220 Parker St. Warsaw, IN 46580

To enroll: (800) 428-0408, option 2

Current students: (800) 428-0408, option 1

info@trinityschool.org

Stretches to Support Your Back & Neck

Introduction

Whether you're chasing kids around or sitting at an office desk, it's not uncommon to reach the end of the day with a stiff, sore neck or back. In fact, researchers estimate that at least 85% of people experience some type of neck or back pain.¹ However, easing your discomfort should not be difficult. By taking time to stretch daily and giving your body the support it needs, you can reduce stiffness and soreness.

To help you establish a consistent routine, we've compiled a few simple stretches that you can implement at home or work. Pictures accompany each suggestion to help you ensure that you're performing the stretch correctly. As always, be sure not to overexert yourself.

Forward & Backward Tilt

You can do the forward tilt stretch several times per day to keep your muscles loose. You can also do it while you are sitting, which makes it especially convenient in an office. Follow these steps:

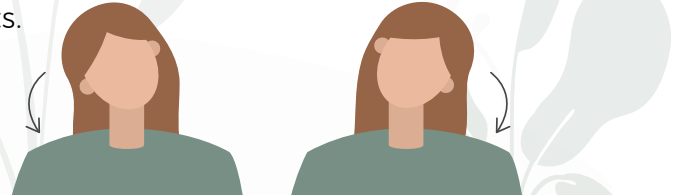
- Square your shoulders and straighten your back.
- Lower your chin to your chest until you feel a slight pull in the back of your neck; however, do not stretch to the point of discomfort. Hold this position for about 20 seconds; then slowly lift your head until you're looking forward. Pause briefly.
- Tilt your head backward, bringing your chin toward the ceiling. Again, listen to your body and be careful not to overdo the stretch. Hold the position for 10 seconds before lifting your head back to the starting position.
- Repeat this set five times.



Side Tilt

It is best to perform this stretch while standing with your feet hip-width apart and arms at your sides. Once you're in this position, do the following:

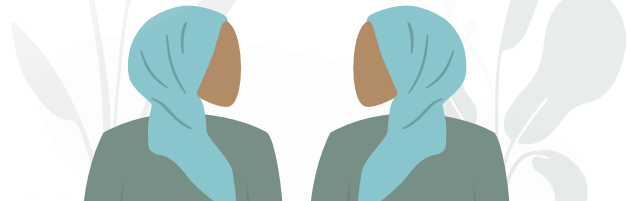
- Move your ear toward your right shoulder while keeping your shoulder in one place. Stop when you feel the stretch, and hold the position for about 10 seconds.
- Return to the start position and repeat the same movement on your left side.
- Repeat the side tilt on both sides a couple of times. You can work your way up to doing 10 sets.
- If your body wants to extend this stretch, you can put your hand on the top of the head and gently press with your fingertips to accentuate the movement.



Side Rotation

This is another stretch you can do no matter where you are, as it is safe to perform while sitting or standing.

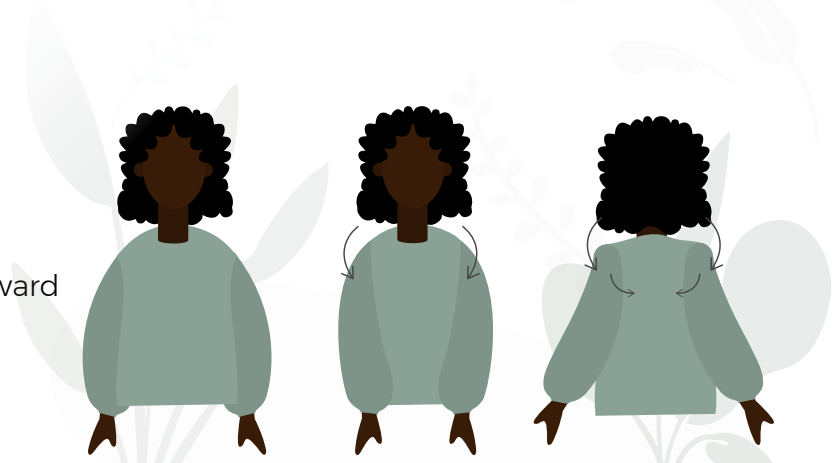
- To start, square your head over your shoulders and straighten your back.
- Carefully turn your head to the right until you feel the stretch lightly in the side of your neck and shoulder. You can hold this position for up to 30 seconds.
- Turn your head back to the starting position and repeat the same process for your left side.
- Complete up to 10 sets of this stretch.



Shoulder Roll

The shoulder roll is a simple stretch that you can do at any time of day. It's easy to fit in while you're making lunch for the kids or taking a break at work. Start in a standing position, and you'll feel your muscles loosen within minutes.

- Put your arms down at your sides, stand up straight, and stay relaxed.
- Roll your shoulders forward in an exaggerated circular motion and slowly complete five full rotations.
- Initiate the same rotation in a backward motion, completing it five times.
- Repeat the sequence, forward and backward, two or three times.



Overhead Arm Reach

This stretch is especially helpful if you're suffering from combined neck and back pain because it supports the muscles in both areas. To complete it safely, sit down in a chair facing forward and place your feet flat on the ground.

- Extend both arms above your head and clasp your hands together. Feel free to hold the stretch here for a few seconds until you feel comfortable.
- Reach your clasped hands gently to the left without letting your shoulders collapse toward your chest. You should feel the stretch in your right shoulder and your right latissimus dorsi.
- Return to the starting position with your hands clasped together. Then repeat the same process, bending your torso toward the left again. Do this five times.
- After you've completed the left-leaning stretches, repeat these steps on your right side. Since you're leaning in the opposite direction, you should feel the stretch in your left shoulder and left latissimus dorsi. As always, be careful to stop before you lean too far and pull a muscle.



Chair Rotation

If you're dealing with lower, mid, and upper back pain, the chair rotation is an excellent stretch for targeting all three areas of discomfort. Start in a firm, straight-backed chair to get the most support.

- Put your legs to the side of the chair, with your right side resting against the chair's back.
- Rotate your torso to the right while keeping your legs stationary. To ensure your upper body moves smoothly, imagine yourself reaching your hands to rest on the back of the chair.
- Hold your upper body in this stretch for 10 seconds, using your arms to deepen the extension and loosen your muscles.
- Slowly ease your torso back so that it is in line with your legs. Repeat the movement three more times.
- Switch your legs to the other side of the chair and carry out the same stretch on your left side.



Conclusion: Support Your Body

When your body is happy, your mind and spirit benefit. Often, you are able to think more clearly and focus on what matters most. While you might not have time to implement all six of these stretches into your daily schedule, consider choosing two or three of them that fit into your life best. Ask a friend to hold you accountable to your routine and to encourage your pursuit of total wellness.

If you want to dive deeper into all the ways you can support yourself physically, become a Certified Holistic Fitness Specialist. You'll learn how to take a full-body approach to fitness, from proper exercises and stretches to natural methods for boosting your performance. For more information or to enroll in one of our programs, reach out to an enrollment specialist by calling 800-428-0408, option 2.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.pennmedicine.org/updates/blogs/neuroscience-blog/2017/april/spine-pain-and-age>



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