

Getting Fit at the Office

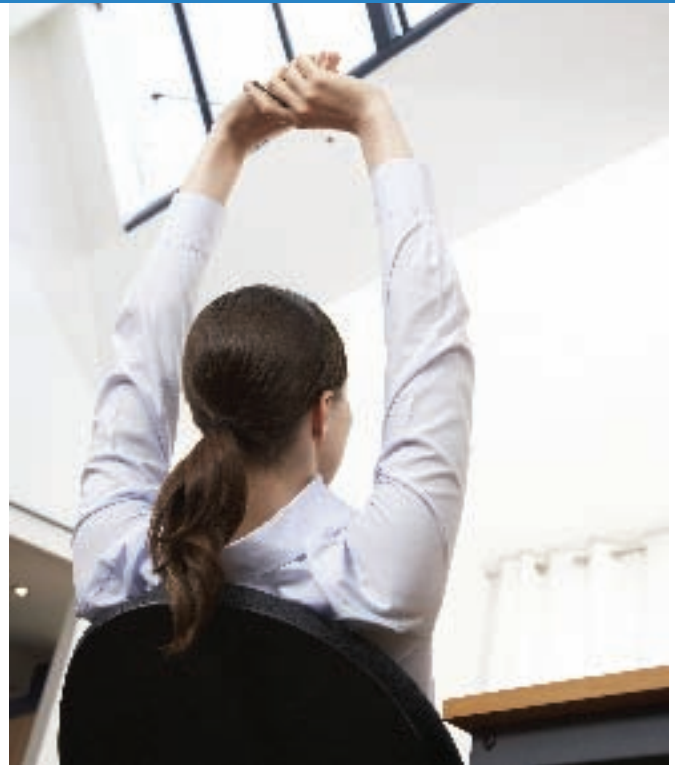
It's hard to find the time to exercise, so do some of your workout ... at work

BY VIRGINIA HUGHES

More than half of all American adults report spending less than 30 minutes a day on moderate exercise, including walking, gardening, vacuuming or anything else that causes small increases in heart rate, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The same sorry trends hold true in most of the First World, despite the fact that most everyone has heard of the benefits of exercise: increased energy, focus and flexibility and a decreased risk of heart disease and obesity. So why are the rates so low?

"Lack of time is consistently the No. 1 reason people cite for not exercising on a regular basis," says Cedric Bryant, chief science officer at the American Council on Exercise (ACE). "And that time is the time that we spend at the workplace."

But being confined to an office job is no excuse for inactivity. "Exercise is like loose change: a few nickels here, a few dimes there—it all adds up to real money at the end of the day," Bryant says. Scientific research has



shown that stretching or mild cardiovascular sessions of even five or 10 minutes, when done throughout the day, add up to increased range of motion, better balance and release of muscle tension.

To help the desk-bound work fitness into their daily routine, BOSS talked to some exercise experts to find out the best ways to exercise at your desk.

A Few Suggested Stretches

Neck:

Turn your neck slowly to the left as far as you can and hold the stretch. Then repeat on the right side.

Follow on each side with a lateral stretch: slowly move your ear to your shoulder and hold.

Shoulders:

Place your left palm flat against your middle back. Reach your right arm over your right shoulder and stretch until you touch your left hand. Repeat on opposite side.

Hamstrings:

Sit in your office chair with your right leg bent and foot on the floor and the left leg stretched out straight ahead of you, toes pointing upward. Rest your right arm on your right knee. With your left arm, reach for your left toes and hold stretch.

Wrists:

Standing at your desk, place your hands palm down on its surface. Lean forward over hands and hold stretch.

Stretch your right arm out straight in front of you, with fingers extended upward. Use your left hand to pull your fingers toward your body. Repeat for the left wrist.

Stretch

"Unfortunately, most people look at fitness as only aerobic conditioning and strength training," says New York University physical therapy professor Marilyn Moffat. "But flexibility is a parameter of fitness that should be considered, too."

As we age, the connective tissue in our muscles becomes less elastic, limiting our normal range of motion. "I see more and more older bodies that are tight tight tight," Moffat says. "They're sorry that they didn't maintain the normal range of motion within the joints during their younger years."

There are dozens of stretches that can be done—standing or sitting—to decrease muscle stiffness. (See sidebar.) Each should be held for a minimum of 30 seconds and a maximum of 60 seconds, according to Moffat.

All of these stretches help to relax your posture and relieve the neck and back strain that most people experience when they're stuck at a computer all day, Bryant says.

Tone and Balance

Building muscle tone doesn't require a bench press. Moffat suggests keeping small weights under your desk, and lifting

them with your arms or legs every time you make a phone call. "As long as you make a maximum effort, it doesn't have to take a long time. You don't have to do three reps of 15," she says. (See sidebar for more toning tips.)

Move!

Experts say clever office workers can fit some aerobic conditioning into the day, too—without a treadmill.

"Even if you're trapped in an office eight, 12, 15 hours a day—the important thing to remember is to choose the most active way of doing anything," says Joan Price, author of *The Anytime, Anywhere Exercise Book*. She says that standing, because of the leg, back and abdominal muscles used, burns 25 percent more calories than sitting. Instead of sitting down during phone calls, Price suggests buying a telephone headset and walking around the room.

"Take fitness breaks whenever you have to wait for something," she adds, like when waiting for a phone call or a report to print. Coffee breaks provide another great opportu-

nity for exercise. "Instead of caffeine and sugar, why not head out the door and powerwalk the hallways?" Price says.

Moffat adds that hallway walks can be times for stretching, too. "You can do neck turns to challenge your balance, or walk on your toes," she says.

Wear Jeans

A few years ago, ACE commissioned a study at the University of Wisconsin that explored whether someone's activity changed with their outfit. Strapping ankle pedometers to 53 office workers, the researchers found that when their subjects wore casual clothing (on their weekly "Casual Day,") the number of steps they took throughout the day was 8 percent higher than when they wore uncomfortable business attire.

Most people are shocked to learn that relatively small changes can improve their health, says Bryant. "Most people think that if you don't have 45 minutes, why even bother? That's why we have to get the message out there: every minute you have is going to be beneficial." ■

Some Suggested Toning Exercises (15-20 reps each)

One-Legged Squats

Stand up straight. Raise your right leg off the floor. Bend your left leg while lowering your body slowly into a squat. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on other leg.

Desk Push-Ups

Stand in front of your desk and put your hands down on the surface. Take a big step backward with both feet and then do slow push-ups against the desk.

Ab Pulls

While sitting down or standing up, pull your abdominal muscles in and up—as if they were being pushed toward your spine and then up your back. Breathe normally.

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