DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

Family and Consumer Sciences

FSFCS17

Deskercise: Unfold, Extend and Relax

Lauren Copeland
Program Associate - Health

Jessica Vincent
County Extension Agent - Family and Consumer Sciences

Lisa Washburn, DrPH
Associate Professor - Health

LaVona Traywick, Ph.D.
Former Associate Professor - Gerontology

Prolonged sitting, defined as sitting eight or more hours each day, may be harmful to your health. Too much sitting can be harmful for everyone, even those who regularly exercise. However, those who do not exercise or do so infrequently are most at risk for negative health effects.

Physical inactivity, which is related to prolonged sitting, is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide. Research suggests that taking breaks throughout the day to reduce sitting time is important for good health. Regular movement can counteract the increased risks of poor health associated with sitting for long periods. Today, less than 20 percent of jobs are physically active. Those with office jobs sit, on average, 10 hours per day. Inactivity is not just an issue for those still in the workforce. Most Americans do not meet minimum physical activity recommendations for good health, making it important for everyone to move more.

Experts recommend those with sedentary jobs break up segments of seated work with standing work and short but frequent light-intensity activity. At first, accumulate at least two hours each day of standing and light activity during working hours. Gradually progress to accumulate four hours of these activities. Light-intensity activity includes changing postures, standing and movement within an office space.

Try the exercises described here to decrease sitting time and increase movement. Listen to your body for cues that it is time to move.

ExtensionGetFit

For example, feeling stiff while seated or a feeling of numbness or tingling in parts of the body are clear signs to stand up and move.

To reduce risk of negative health effects from too much sitting:

- At least once each hour, take a break from sitting. Stand up and walk around for a few minutes.
- Take breaks from sitting to stretch muscles that may be fatigued or tense.
- Accumulate at least two hours of standing and light-intensity activity during work hours.

Exercise Safety

Check with your healthcare provider before starting any exercise program. Pay attention to how you feel while exercising. Stop any movement that feels painful. Deskercise, or exercises you can do sitting at a desk, is not just for people to perform at work. These exercises and stretches are appropriate for anyone regardless of fitness level. The only equipment needed is a chair.

For some, an injury, disability, illness or weight problems make it difficult to exercise. Most people should be as active as their condition will allow. Any type of exercise can offer health benefits. Regardless of age, current physical condition or sedentary job requirements, everyone can enjoy the physical, mental and emotional benefits of exercise.

Visit our web site at:
https://www.uaex.uada.edu

These exercises can be performed daily as a routine part of your break from sitting. If new to exercise, try these exercises at least two to three times each week. Perform all the exercises to stretch and strengthen the entire body, or choose a few exercises to focus on areas of tension. The stretching and strengthening exercises, in addition to moderate-intensity exercise of at least 150 minutes each week, will help you to stay healthy and be productive.

Exercise Instructions

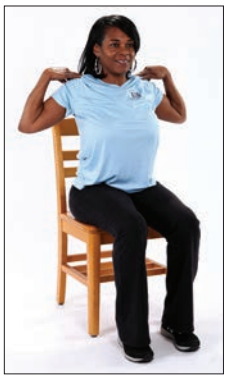
Lateral Neck Stretch

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Reach your right arm behind you and rest your right hand on your left hip; clasp your hands. If clasping your hands is uncomfortable, leave your left arm down by your side and place your right fingers on the inside of your left elbow.
3. Keeping your shoulders down, slowly lower your left ear toward your left shoulder.
4. Hold 10-30 seconds.
5. Slowly return to center and repeat on opposite side.
6. Perform stretch twice on both sides.

Shoulder Shrug

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Slowly raise your shoulders up towards your ears.
3. Slowly lower back down for one repetition.
4. Perform two to three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

Shoulder Circles



1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Place your hands on your shoulders with your elbows pointing forward.
3. Rotate your shoulders backward, drawing a circle with your elbows for 8-12 repetitions.
4. Repeat with a forward motion to complete one set.
5. Perform two to three sets.

Shoulder Rotation

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Raise your arms to the side
3. Bend the elbows to form a 90° angle with palms forward and fingertips pointing upward (like goal posts).
4. Without changing the bend in the elbows, slowly rotate your forearms down and work your fingertips down towards the floor.
5. Work within your range of motion; avoid shrugging the shoulders.
6. Slowly return to the starting position for one repetition.
7. Perform two to three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

Triceps Stretch

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Raise your right arm straight up and bend the elbow to rest your right palm on your upper back.
3. Extend your left arm up and overhead and place your left hand on your right elbow.
4. Gently pull until you feel a stretch in the back of the right arm.
5. Hold 10-30 seconds.
6. Repeat on the opposite side.
7. Perform stretch twice on both sides.

Thumb Bends

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Holding both hands open in front of you, spread your fingers apart.
3. Touch the base of each finger with your thumb; opening hand fully before moving on to the next finger.
4. Work your way back to the starting finger to complete one set.
5. Perform two to three sets.

Fist Squeeze*

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Hold a stress ball (or other small foam ball) in your hand then squeeze and hold 5-30 seconds.
3. Release and repeat two to three times.

*Note: If you have two stress balls, both hands may be exercised at the same time.

Finger Walk

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Place both hands on a flat surface with palms down. Keeping your fingers together, point the thumbs toward each other.
3. Without raising your hands, lift index fingers and move them toward your thumbs.
4. Repeat with remaining fingers.
5. Work your way back to the starting position to complete one set.
6. Perform two to three sets.

Seated Cat/Cow

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Place both hands on your thighs.
3. For Cat, pull your belly button inward toward your spine, rounding through the upper back and shoulders; tuck the chin in toward your chest.
4. For Cow, lift your chest and chin, and slightly arch your back drawing your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
5. Slowly move from Cat to Cow to complete one repetition.
6. Perform two to three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

Chest Stretch

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Stretch your arms out to your sides until they are parallel to the floor. With your hands open, face your palms forward and point your thumbs upward.
3. Squeeze and draw your shoulder blades together. Keep your arms straight, shoulders down, and head in line with your spine.
4. Hold 10-30 seconds
5. Perform stretch twice.

Upward Bound

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Lower your arms to your sides with palms facing inward and your fingers pointed towards the floor.
3. Slowly raise your arms out to the side and interlace your fingers overhead. Palms can be facing up or down.
4. Extend your interlaced fingers upward toward the ceiling.
5. Slowly lower to starting position to complete one repetition.
6. Perform two to three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

Seated Lateral Stretch*

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Place your right hand on your right hip and raise your left arm straight up.
3. Slowly bend at the waist and lean to the right. Keep your left arm in line with your left ear, extend through your fingers.
4. Hold 10-30 seconds.
5. Slowly return to center and repeat on opposite side.
6. Perform stretch twice on each side.

* Note: For more stability, hold on to the chair.

Hip Walk

1. Sit up straight toward the back of your chair; draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Place your hands on your hips.
3. Shift weight to your left leg and raise your right heel off the floor.
4. Walk your right hip forward and lower your right heel.
5. Repeat on the opposite side.
6. In the same manner, walk your hips backward to the starting position for one repetition.
7. Perform two to three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

Hamstring Stretch*

1. Sit up straight toward the front edge of your chair; draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Straighten both legs out in front of you. Place your heels on the floor with the toes pointing upward.
3. While keeping your back flat and your head in line with your spine, reach both hands toward your feet.
4. Work within your range of motion.
5. Hold 10-30 seconds.
6. Slowly return to the starting position.
7. Perform stretch twice.

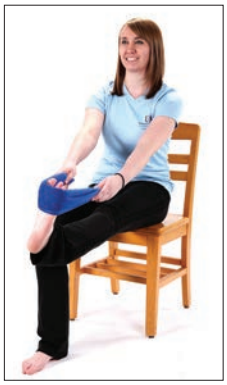
*Note: This exercise can be performed one leg at a time. Keep your right knee bent with foot flat on the floor; straighten your left leg, heel on the floor, toes pointed upward. Reach toward your left foot. Repeat on the opposite side.

Feet Flexion*

1. Sit up straight toward the back of your chair; draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Straighten both legs and raise them off the floor to a comfortable height.
3. Slowly pull your toes toward your shins and point them upward.
4. Slowly push your toes away from you and point them forward to complete one repetition.
5. Perform two to three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

*Note: For more stability, hold on to the chair or do one leg at a time.

Arch Stretch*



1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine, feet flat on the floor.
2. Hold the end of a towel, strap or belt in each hand.
3. Bring your right knee toward your chest and place the towel around the ball of your right foot.
4. Straighten your right leg until you feel a stretch in the arch of your right foot. Keep a slight bend in your knee.
5. Hold 10-30 seconds.
6. Repeat on the opposite side.
7. Perform stretch twice on each side.

* Note: This exercise is best performed without shoes.

Arch Roll

1. Sitting up straight, draw your shoulders down and back away from your ears, head in line with your spine.
2. With your shoes removed, place a small ball under your right foot, leaving your left foot flat on the floor.
3. Roll the ball under your right foot for 10-30 seconds.
4. Repeat on the opposite side.
5. Perform twice on each side.

The poster – MP536, *Deskercise: Unfold, Extend and Relax* – is available to order from the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service web site at www.uaex.uada.edu (click the "Publications" link).

References

Biswas, A., P. Oh, G. Faulkner, R. Bajaj, M. Silver, M. Mitchell and D. Alter. (2015). Sedentary time and its association with risk for disease incidence, mortality and hospitalization in adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 162(2), 123-132. doi: 10.7326./M14-1651

World Health Organization (2010). Global recommendations on physical activity for health. World Health Organization Press: Geneva.

Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. *Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, 2008*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008.

Buckley, J., A. Hedge, T. Yates, R. Copeland, M. Loosemore, M. Hamer, G. Bradley and D. Dunstan. (2015). The sedentary office: a growing case for change toward better health and productivity. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2015-094618.

Photo Credit: Kerry Rodtnick from the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

LAUREN COPELAND is program associate - health, **JESSICA VINCENT** is county Extension agent - family and consumer sciences, **DR. LISA WASHBURN** is associate professor - health, and **DR. LaVONA TRAYWICK** is former associate professor - gerontology. Copeland, Vincent and Washburn are with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. Copeland and Washburn are located in Little Rock, and Vincent is located in Hot Springs.

Pursuant to 7 CFR § 15.3, the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services (including employment) without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, sexual preference, pregnancy or any other legally protected status, and is an equal opportunity institution.

FSFCS17-PD-11-2016N