



## **Seated Exercises & Stretches**

### **Seated Belly Breathing**

Stress and illness can change the way we breathe, and though most of us are pretty sure we've been breathing alright since, you know, we've been at it for a while, what I want to introduce to you is the idea of noticing where your breath is in your body regularly throughout the day, and trying to consciously change that if needed.

Place one hand over your bellybutton and one hand on your chest. Take a deep breath in through your nose and focus on feeling the hand on your belly rise. When you breathe out, the hand on your stomach should lower naturally, without a lot of effort. Try to keep your inhale and exhale the same length. You can put your hands on your low ribcage, and breathe the same way, thinking about getting that air not just in the belly but also into the back and sides, expanding like a balloon or a ripple in a pond. Again, try to keep your inhale and exhale the same length. Four seconds in, four out, or whatever feels like a good ratio to you.

Now notice what happens if you're breathing into the top hand: look how much more motion and muscle activity there is. It's exhausting! Air is still getting into the lungs, but it takes much more effort. So belly breaths mean we don't have to work as hard to get air in, and they also activate a part of our nervous system that helps calm the body down. And if you hear your belly gurgling, this means you're doing it right, since these breaths act like an abdominal massage, promoting better digestion and elimination, among their many other benefits. *Note: If you find this challenging, try to perform the supine (lying down) version to start.*

### **Chair Cat Cow**

To mobilize along the whole length of the spine, start by putting your hands on your knees and sitting up tall. Then round the back, curling up tucking your chin down and your tailbone underneath you. Now go the other way, looking up and arching the back at the same time. Try to arch the back on an inhale, and round the back on an exhale. Do this exercise within whatever is a comfortable range of motion for you.

### **Seated Calf Raises & Marching**

Lift your heels off the ground as high as you can. This improves the circulation in your lower legs and can help prevent blood clots. Make sure you're sitting up straight in your chair when you do these and do at least ten every hour if you're otherwise not moving much.

Next, some marching! Lift your knee as high as you can in the air. Your back should stay straight, and you can alternate sides or do one side at the time if you'd prefer.

And though it's not shown here, you can also kick your knee straight out in front of you while sitting in a chair. All of this will improve your knee and hip flexibility.



## COVID PHYSICAL THERAPY

### **Seated “Figure Four” Hip Stretch**

To loosen muscles around the hips that can get tight from sitting for a while, start by putting your ankle on your knee. Sit up tall, and then lean forward, keeping your back and head very straight, as straight as you can. The second you hunch over, as you can see, you lose the benefit of this stretch.

Sitting for a long time tightens up these hip muscles, and you can add a little gentle pressure around the knee to increase the stretch if needed and if it feels good or adjust where the ankle is to stretch different parts of the hip muscles. As always, stop if you have pain or discomfort other than a stretching feeling.

Hold this stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and do it 2 to 4 times on each side.

### **Seated Neck Mobility**

Unless there is a known medical reason for you not to perform these neck stretches, keeping the muscles of your neck and upper back flexible and feeling good is really important. It can help resolve headaches, muscle pain, stiffness, and improves your posture. Obviously if any of these stretches cause discomfort, hold off on them for now.

First, simply rotate your head from side to side, trying to get your chin in line with your shoulder as much as you can and keeping your head straight and nose forward as you turn to each side. Next, look down and then up, as far as you comfortably can in each direction, trying to get the chin to the chest, and the back of the neck to the back.

Now, bring your ear as close as you can towards your shoulder. Use the hand on that side to gently pull the ear closer to the shoulder. Your nose should still be pointing straight ahead. You'll feel this on the side of your neck and upper shoulder. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds on each side, 2 to 4 times.

This next one can be tricky. Point your chin towards your armpit, and then look up and away. You can use your hand to add some additional stretch, and you'll feel this in the front and side of your neck. Keeping that angle, you can turn your head a little to get different muscles and parts of muscles. And to increase the stretch, you can keep that other hand at your collarbone to hold the skin down as you find the best angle for you. Hold 15 to 30 seconds, and again, repeat 2 to 4 times.

Now point your chin towards your armpit again. Put the arm on that side diagonally across your head and gently pull towards your armpit. You can change the angle of the stretch by adjusting the position of your chin, and you might find a slightly different angle feels better or gets you a better stretch. As before, to get a true change in the length of the muscle, hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and repeat 2 to 4 times, even though I didn't do that in the video.



## COVID PHYSICAL THERAPY

### **Upper Body Mobility**

Holding a strap, belt or towel with arms a bit wider than shoulders, bring the arms as far overhead as you can. Bring the arms back down and repeat. Take care not to arch your back. If you have a weaker arm or do not have a strap to use, you can clasp the hands together instead. Inhale as you lift the arms up, and exhale as they come down.

Now hold the strap overhead and bend to 90° at the elbows, keeping the elbows in line with the body, not in front. Push back up. As this gets easier, you can add weights to this overhead press\*, but for now we're using it to improve the mobility at your shoulders and your chest. To add to the chest stretch, you can move one arm out the side and hold for 15 to 30 seconds, then switch sides.

Next, straighten the arms and lean to one side to stretch the side of the body. Focus on breathing into the ribcage on that side, feeling the muscles between the ribs stretch and expand with every inhale. Take several breaths here before you switch sides. This exercise will help the muscles around your ribcage get more flexible so you can take deeper, fuller breaths. Make sure you're keeping your breath steady and even as you do this exercise.

*\*see the Resource list of home objects that can be used as exercise weights\**

### **Seated Posture**

Start by slouching over, curling your tailbone under and drooping your head forward like a wilted flower. Try to take a breath. You'll find it's harder to take a deep full breath when you're slouched since our lungs have less space to expand.

Now arch your back, sticking your bottom out and pulling your head back. This isn't good either, because you've shortened your low back muscles and made your belly tight, which still makes it tough to breathe properly and is not very comfortable.

Now take your hands and put them under your bottom so you feel your hip bones on your fingers. Slouch again, and then arch your back again. Notice how the bones roll on and off your hands. Come to the middle, where you can feel the hip bones pressing straight down on your fingers. This is typically where we can best line up our hips, ribs, shoulders and neck so they are all stacked nicely over one another. You can use this trick anytime you need help improving your posture.

### **Seated Tripod Position (for shortness of breath)**

Put your hands or elbows on your knees and lean forward as you breathe – this is what we call the tripod position. This will help get more air in the lungs when you are feeling short of breath and may make it feel easier to breathe. You can do it either sitting or standing, like after sitting up in bed or if a short walk leaves you breathless. Use it along with the other breathing techniques to help you feel in control of your breath again.



## COVID PHYSICAL THERAPY

### **Chair Thoracic Extension**

To loosen up the mid and upper back, place a ball or rolled towel just under the shoulder blades. Put your hands behind your head and arch back, keeping your head and elbows in line with your shoulders. Come forward and repeat several more times. Inhale as you arch back and exhale as you come forward.

Then adjust the ball slightly downward and do it again. Remember to inhale as you arch back and exhale as you come forward. You can improve the mobility all along the upper and midback like this, and it can help with breathing, posture and resolving mid and upper back pain or stiffness.

### **Chair Torso Twist**

Holding a strap, belt or towel with arms at shoulder width, rotate as far to one side as you can while still sitting comfortably in the chair. Keep your eyes on the strap and your head turning with your arms. This rotation exercise makes our midback more flexible and can decrease stiffness and discomfort in these areas.

If you have no strap or have arm weakness on one side, clasp the hands together instead, using the stronger arm to hold up the weaker one. This can be useful after having a stroke, for instance. Keep your eyes on your hands and keep your bottom evenly in the chair as you turn.

If you have a stable chair with armrest, you can grab onto the armrest to help yourself get a deeper twist. Take several slow breaths in and out on each twist and see if you can feel a stretch at your back and side as you do this. Switch sides when ready and do this as often as needed.

### **Chair Sit-to-Stand**

To make standing up easier, lean far forward and come up at an angle, like a plane coming off a runway. You can start by using armrests if you need to. To make sure you're safe sitting down, reach back and find those armrests before you send your bottom back into the chair.

As you start to feel more stable and strong, try to stand by having your hands on your knees and pushing through your hands if needed, still coming up at an angle and leaning forward before you fully stand up. Think "nose over toes" so you remember lean forward, and don't hold your breath: try exhaling as you come up to standing.

Next, try to stand up and sit down without any support at all. If you are on a low chair or couch, try scooting to the edge and have your feet a little behind your knees before you try to stand.

This is an important exercise to do regularly since we need to be able to safely get in and out of chairs and stand up from the bed or the toilet all the time.

***There are several other techniques we intend to add to this list and to our video collection in the near future. Please get in touch if you would know when we update these resources.***