

# Deskercise – Sit, Stretch, Strengthen

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Most American adults get too little physical activity. Adults spend more than half their waking hours being sedentary. Too little physical activity can negatively affect health, leading to increased chronic disease risk, obesity and premature death. Those who work in offices spend 65 to 75 percent of the workday sitting. Sitting too long increases health risks even for those who exercise regularly. Research suggests that taking breaks throughout the day to reduce prolonged sitting time is important for good health.

Those with sedentary desk jobs may improve health by including short bouts of activity in the workday. Those bound to a cubicle or desk can opt for desk exercises. The benefits of exercise are cumulative, so any amount is good for health and well-being. In addition to improving health, desk exercises may also help boost productivity at work.

Office workers commonly suffer from muscle tension in the neck, shoulders and back. Poor posture often plays a role. Prolonged sitting can lead to tight leg muscles, particularly in the hamstrings, and stiff joints. The exercises in this guide will help relieve muscle tension and joint stiffness and increase flexibility.

Deskercise, or exercises you can do sitting at a desk, is not just for people to do at work. These exercises and stretches can be performed by anyone. The benefits of exercise are not restricted to people who can get up and walk. For some individuals, injury, disability, illness or weight problems make it difficult to exercise. It is important to remember that



any type of exercise can offer health benefits. Regardless of your age, current physical condition or required sitting due to your job, there are ways to exercise and reap the physical, mental and emotional benefits of exercise.

Try these exercises at least two to three times each week. 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.

## Tips for Exercising in a Chair

- Choose a chair that allows you to keep your knees at 90 degrees when seated.
- If in a wheelchair, securely apply the brakes or otherwise immobilize the chair.
- Try to sit up straight and tall while exercising; maintain good posture.
- Add resistance to strengthening exercises by incorporating hand weights or resistance bands.
- Bend forward from the hips, not the waist, keeping your back straight while stretching.
- Always warm up your muscles before you stretch.



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## Sample Exercises

### Shoulder Blade Pinch

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
2. Pinch your shoulder blades together by trying to bring your elbows together behind your back.
3. Hold for a few seconds, working your way up to a 30 second hold.
4. Repeat three to five times.



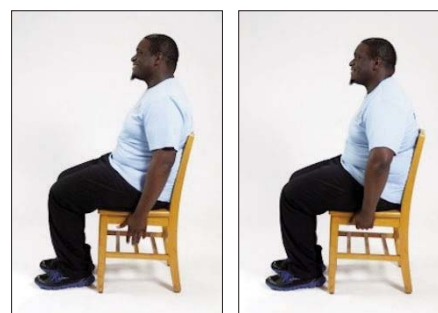
### Self Back Rub

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
2. Rest the backs of your hands flat on your lower back, fingers pointing toward your spine.
3. Slowly slide both hands up your back as far as you can without shrugging your shoulders, then slide your hands back down to your lower back.
4. Repeat 10 times.



### Isometric Arm Lift

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
2. Place your hands underneath either side of your chair, grasping the chair edge.
3. While remaining seated, pull up on the seat of the chair. You may need to bend your elbows to prevent shrugging your shoulders up to your ears.
4. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
5. Repeat three to five times.  
\* Note: You will not actually lift the chair but should feel muscles in your arms contract.



### Back Stretch

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
2. Bend at the hips and rest your torso on your thighs, letting your head and arms hang loose.
3. Hold for 15-30 seconds then slowly return to the starting position.
4. Repeat three to five times.  
\* Note: You can widen your legs to make more room for your body.



## Hip Stretch

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Place the ankle of your left leg on top your right leg just above your knee.
3. Lean your torso forward over your legs and hold for 15-30 seconds.
4. Slowly return to the starting position and then repeat on the other side.
5. Repeat this stretch two to three times on each side.  
\* To increase the stretch, place your elbow (on the side of the top leg) on your thigh just above the knee and press down as you lean forward.



## Trunk Twist

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Hold your arms in front of you with your forearms stacked.
3. Without leaning, twist your torso to the right.
4. Return to center, and then twist to the left.
5. Repeat 10 times.



## Elbow Crunch

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Rest your hands behind your head and open your elbows out wide.
3. Twist your torso to the left to bring your right elbow to your left knee. Don't use your hands to pull your head.
4. Return to center, and then repeat on the other side.
5. Repeat 10 times.



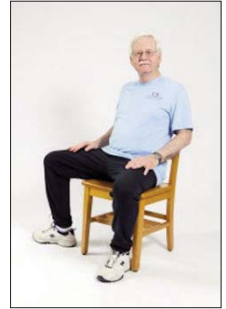
## Rocking Chair

1. Sit on the edge of your chair with your back straight, shoulders down and back away from your ears, and feet flat on the floor for the whole exercise.
2. Cross your arms across your chest.
3. Engage your core muscles and lean as far back as you can without touching the back of your chair.
4. Hold for 3-5 seconds, and then slowly return to the starting position.
5. Repeat 10 times.



## Flamingo Legs

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Pick your right leg up and take a wide side step out.
3. Hold for 3-5 seconds, and then return to center.
4. Do the same on the left side.
5. Repeat 10 times.  
\* Note: You can also perform this exercise with both legs at the same time.



## Thigh Squeeze

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Place a stress ball (or any soft, squishy object) between your thighs just above your knees.
3. Squeeze the ball between your legs for 15-30 seconds then release.
4. Rest for 10 seconds then repeat the exercise.
5. Repeat three to five times.



## Heel Slide

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor. Your right leg should be extended past the left.
2. Touch the heel of your left foot to your right shin by your ankle.
3. Slide your foot up your shin as high as you can, and then slide it back down to your ankle 10 times.
4. Repeat on the other side.



## Knee Lift With Extension

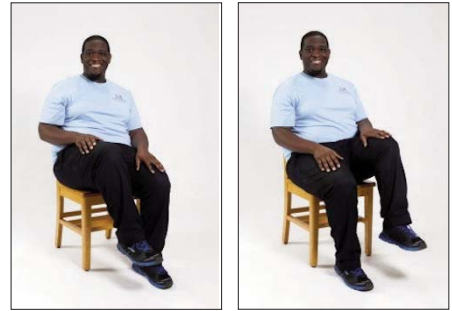
1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Lift your right leg off the floor, and then straighten your leg out in front of you. Try to get the leg parallel to the floor without locking your knee.
3. Bend your knee and return your foot to the floor.
4. Repeat 10 times, and then repeat 10 times on the left side.



\* Note: If this exercise is uncomfortable for your knees, place a rolled up towel under your knees.

## Marching

1. Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Take turns lifting your legs off the floor, as if you are marching in place. Lift your knees as high as you can.
3. Do this at a moderate pace for 30 seconds to one minute.



The poster – MP524, *Deskercise: Sit, Stretch and Strengthen* – is available to order from the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service web site at [www.uaex.edu](http://www.uaex.edu) (click the “Publications” link).

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