

Body Work for Energy

A guide to using gentle, targeted movement to lift energy during the working day.

Sitting for long stretches doesn't just tire the back and shoulders — it dampens energy too. Prolonged stillness slows circulation, compresses the chest and shortens the breath, and lets the body settle into a collapsed, low-arousal posture that the mind tends to follow. Short, deliberate bouts of movement counter this: they get blood and oxygen moving, open up the chest and spine, and give the nervous system a physical signal to wake up.

Much of what follows is yoga-informed — postures and flows developed and refined over a very long tradition of practice. It sits alongside more everyday movement, like squats and calf raises, that works through the same basic principle: get up, move, and get the blood moving again.

Body work for energy

* Backbends & chest openers

Why: Desk work pulls the body forward — rounded shoulders, a collapsed chest, a flexed spine.

Opening shapes work the other way, lifting and broadening the chest for a fuller, deeper breath — both linked to feeling more alert.

- Works standing, seated or lying down
- Lead with the chest, not the chin
- A few slow breaths is enough

≈ Cat-cow & spinal flow

Why: A slow, rhythmic flow between arching and rounding the spine mobilises the whole back after it's been held still, and syncs movement with breath — a low-effort way to bring the spine, and attention, back into the body.

- Move slowly, one vertebra at a time
- Let the breath lead the movement
- A good first move of the day

↕ Gentle inversions

Why: Shapes that bring the head below the heart, even mildly, briefly change the direction of blood flow and are often used to settle an overstimulated mind — leaving you clearer and more level rather than simply wired.

- No need to go upside down — a forward fold counts
- Best when you have a few calm minutes
- Come up slowly

↻ Spinal twists

Why: Rotation is a movement the spine barely gets while sitting facing forward all day. Twists mobilise the mid and upper back and release tension either side of the spine.

- Twist from the ribcage, not just the shoulders
- Works seated at a desk or standing
- Keep hips facing forward

🔄 Postural resets

Why: Small corrections — shoulders back and down, chin gently tucked, shoulder blades drawn together — counter the forward-hunched 'screen posture' that builds up over the day, easing the effort of holding a slump.

- Set a reminder every hour
- Squeeze shoulder blades together and hold
- Takes seconds, no space needed

▲ Squats

Why: Squats work some of the largest muscles in the body, so even a handful raises heart rate and blood flow quickly — a fast, practical way to counter post-sitting sluggishness.

- Bodyweight is enough
- 5–10 reps is enough to feel it
- Use a chair for support if needed

↑ Calf raises

Why: The calf muscles act as a secondary pump, helping push blood back up from the legs. Long, still sitting lets that flow stall, contributing to heavy legs by mid-afternoon.

- Can be done seated under a desk
- Slow, controlled reps work best
- Good to pair with a phone call

✦ Jumping jacks & short bursts

Why: A minute or two of continuous, whole-body movement raises heart rate more than any single stretch can — the fastest route to feeling more awake.

- Keep it to 1–2 minutes
- Step outside if you can
- Pair with a proper break, not just a stretch

As a general guide: aim for two to three minutes of movement roughly every half hour to hour, choosing whatever suits your body and the moment.

Evidence base

Backed by research

Breaking up sitting with brief, regular movement is well supported: systematic reviews and controlled trials in office workers consistently link short active breaks (roughly 2–5 minutes, every 30–60 minutes) to lower self-reported fatigue and higher energy and vigour through the day, alongside benefits for musculoskeletal discomfort and cardiometabolic markers. Where yoga-style movement has been tested directly for fatigue — in populations with chronic fatigue, cancer-related fatigue and multiple sclerosis — meta-analyses show a consistent, moderate reduction, though trials are relatively few and mostly outside healthy desk workers.

Rooted in yoga tradition & practice

Many of the specific themes here — opening the chest for breath and mood, inversions as a mental reset, twists for spinal mobility and vitality — come from a body of yoga teaching and lived practice refined over hundreds of years, rather than from clinical trials. This isn't the same kind of evidence as a randomised trial, but it's a plausible alternative: a long, consistent record of observation and experience across many teachers and practitioners, worth taking seriously alongside the science rather than instead of it.