PHYSICAL EASE AND COMFORT · MOVEMENT

Body Work for Physical Ease and Comfort

A guide to easing the specific areas a desk job puts under the most sustained load.

Sitting still for hours doesn't strain the body evenly — it loads a handful of areas over and over: the neck and shoulders holding a screen-forward posture, the chest shortening as the upper back rounds, the hips staying folded, the wrists fixed in one position, the legs going still for long stretches at a time, and the eyes fixed at one distance. Left unaddressed, that steady, one-directional load is what turns into stiffness and discomfort.

What follows is grouped by the part of the body a desk job affects most, and what each area needs to counter the stresses. As a general guide, little and often beats occasional long stretching sessions — work through whichever area needs it most today.

↻ Neck & Shoulders

Why: Looking down at a screen and reaching for a mouse holds the neck forward and the shoulders raised, tightening the muscles that hold that position.

- Releasing tension held in raised, forward-drawn shoulders
- Mobilising the neck through its full range of movement
- Counteracting the forward head position screens encourage
- Resetting posture by opening the chest and drawing the shoulder blades back together

✣ Upper Back & Chest

Why: Typing rounds the shoulders forward, shortening the chest and letting the muscles between the shoulder blades go weak and lax.

- Mobilising the upper spine through gentle flexion and extension
- Opening and lengthening the chest to counter rounded shoulders
- Strengthening the muscles between the shoulder blades that typing switches off

◈ Lower Back & Hips

Why: Hours in hip flexion shorten the hip flexors, switch off the glutes, and leave the lower back doing more stabilising work than it should.

- Moving the hips out of the fixed, folded position held while seated
- Releasing tension held either side of the spine through gentle rotation
- Lengthening the back of the body and letting the lower back release
- Reactivating the glutes that switch off during long sitting

✦ Wrists & Hands

Why: Repetitive typing and mouse use keep the wrist in a fixed, slightly extended position for long stretches with little variation.

- Mobilising the wrists through their full range of movement
- Releasing tension built up from repetitive typing and mouse use
- Stretching the muscles that control finger movement, worked constantly at a keyboard

Legs & Circulation

Why: Static sitting slows blood flow to the legs, which can leave them feeling stiff, heavy or restless by the afternoon.

- Reactivating the calf muscles that help pump blood back up from the legs
- Getting blood moving through muscles that have gone still
- Taking any opportunity to change position and walk

Eyes & Screen Fatigue

Why: Fixing focus on a screen for long stretches reduces how often you blink and keeps the eye muscles locked at one distance, leading to dryness and strain.

- Resting focus that's been fixed at a near, unchanging distance
- Restoring a normal blink rate, which screen use significantly reduces
- Reducing strain caused by brightness, glare or text size

Building a longer-term strategy

The moves above ease things in the moment. For lasting change, it's the habits around movement and setup that count.

Movement breaks

How often: every 30–60 minutes, when you finish a task if that works, or if not on a recurring reminder

What: ideally combine a short walk with some stretches and mobilising exercises to target the main areas of the body under stress from your working position

Why: regular breaks from a fixed position are what stop load building up in the same few areas

Workstation setup

What to check: screen at eye height, elbows roughly level with the desk, feet supported, chair offering proper lower back support

Why: a well-set-up workstation reduces how much load builds up in the first place, so the moves above have less to undo

Evidence base

Backed by research

Frequent short movement breaks are linked to reduced musculoskeletal discomfort in seated office workers. Targeted stretching and mobility routines are linked to reduced neck, shoulder and lower back discomfort in desk-based workers, and ergonomic workstation adjustments are separately linked to reduced reported discomfort.

Practical guidance, less formally tested

Specific micro-stretches for the wrists, such as circles and the prayer stretch, are widely recommended as prevention for repetitive strain. This is sensible, low-risk practice, but direct trial evidence for these specific moves is limited.