

HEALTHY MOVES

Stretch of the Month

Neck Extensors Stretch

Why Stretch the Neck Extensors

The first in a series of neck stretches will stretch the muscles on the back of the neck. These are the muscles that help us look forward at the horizon and keep our head from tipping forward. They work against the pull of gravity when standing and sitting.

We all suffer varying degrees of tension in these muscles. We can all benefit from stretching them. If you have a forward head posture, as when slouching, your neck extensors will tend to be shortened.

Maintaining flexible neck muscles may delay the onset of arthritic discomforts and reduce some causes of pinched nerves and headaches.

How to Stretch

- Sit in a chair with an erect back rest.
- Slide your buttocks back so that the lower back is fully supported by the backrest.
- Clasp your hands behind your head. Point your elbows to the front.
- Allow your neck to curl forward, starting by tucking your chin toward your breast bone.
- Let the weight of your arms help the stretch.
- Don't pull down with any muscular effort.
- Breathe in and out slowly and comfortably using your diaphragm - i.e. feel your belly move in and out with your breath.



You should feel only a comfortable stretch in back of the neck and sometimes into the upper back.

- *Hold the stretch for 20 to 30 seconds*
- *Repeat 3 times*

If you are very tight start with this stretch first.

Sit in a chair as previously described. Place your hands on your lap. Tuck your chin downward and look to your breast bone.



Look down, only as far as you need, to feel a gentle stretch in the back of your neck.

Breathe slow and deep. As you exhale allow your neck to curl further- ie. bringing your chin closer to your breast bone.

After three breaths look straight ahead and sit tall, for one breath. Repeat this 5 times.

You can repeat this several times per day if you find it relieves tension in your neck. When you've improved with the above stretch, try the instructions to the left.

Always work within your easy level of comfort when stretching tense muscles.

If you suffer from neck pain please discuss with your health professional if either of these stretches is appropriate for you.

Domenic Lopez B.Sc., Exercise Science, is owner and operator of Healthy Moves, a private practice where massage therapy and movement education help you achieve better living. Domenic can be contacted at 610-725-0995 or via email at DomenicLopez@verizon.net. This article can be found at www.HealthyMoves-PA.com.

Disclaimer:

Suggestions made in this publication are no substitute for medical advice. If you have any pain or difficulty performing this stretch seek advice from your appropriate health professional.