

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Body Mechanics & Posture...Working Together as One! By Kyle Stewart

Many of the aches and pains that are felt from time to time are the result of our “own-doing”. These “aches and pains” are related to poor posture, which with minimal effort and time, can be improved through increasing flexibility and stretching exercises. In general, body mechanics are how the body’s joints, bones and muscles work together to produce movement. Below are a few techniques to improve posture and gradually increase flexibility.

Standing:

- The spine should reveal an “S” curve for an ideal posture while standing.
- The ears, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles should all be aligned.

Sitting:

- While sitting, don’t “slouch over” which causes minimal support of back muscles.
- Try not to “mold to the chair” (i.e., lean against the chair back, lean to the side to rest elbow on the arm rest, etc.)
- Avoid “slumping” by adjusting chair’s arm rest, back rest, etc.

Walking and Bending:

- The spine should resemble the “S-Curve” to maintain a center of gravity.
- Walking strides should be controlled and not cause you to lean forward.
- Bend at the hips and knees to pick-up an object, the spine should remain straight.
- For objects on the floor, lower yourself to one knee.

Sleeping:

- Sleeping on your side or back is ideal to promoting proper posture.
- Placing a pillow between your knees may alleviate tension on your hips.
- Placing a pillow beneath your legs may alleviate lower back tension.
- Sleeping on your stomach can cause the lower back to be arched.

Stretching Exercises and Tips:

- Speak with your physician and ensure you’re medically cleared prior to beginning any stretching or exercise program.
- Benefits of stretching include increased flexibility, improved circulation and decreased pain.
- Don’t bounce, hold stretch for at least 30 seconds, but no more than a minute.
- Relax muscles between stretches prior to resuming stretching exercise(s).
- Stretch to the “point” where resistance begins; flexibility will increase over time.
- Stretch prior to beginning an activity and/or following periods of inactivity.

Common Stretching Exercises:

- Neck Stretch (Standing or Seated Position): Slowly turn your head to the right until you feel a stretch along the neck muscles; keep your chin parallel to the floor. Repeat steps to the left, up and down.

- **Shoulder Stretch**: Standing with your back against the wall can be helpful with this stretch. Lift your upper arms to shoulder height. Bending at the elbows, point your forearms and fingers toward the ceiling with your open palms facing forward and attempt to press them into the wall. Hold the stretch here for 10 to 30 seconds and then slowly lower your forearms down so that your fingers are pointing to the floor and again pressing into the wall, if possible.
- **Chest Stretch** (Standing or Seated Position): Open your arms to your sides with the palms facing forward. Start to press them behind you slightly by squeezing your shoulder blades in towards one another.
- **Back Stretch**: Sitting in a chair, lean forward from your hips, attempting to keep your back straight and your chin aligned with your spine. Reach your hands down your legs.
- **Back-of-Leg Stretch**: Sitting in a chair, extend one leg out in front of you slightly and lift your toes so that your foot is resting on your heel. Lean forward slowly from your hips while keeping your back straight. Repeat on the opposite leg.
- **Front-of-Leg Stretch**: Stand behind a chair or stable object to assist you with your balance. Holding the chair with one hand, bend one knee and lift the same foot up towards your buttocks to stretch the front of your thigh and hip. If possible, reach with your opposite hand to hold onto your ankle. If you are unable to lift your foot up or balance on leg, this stretch can be performed while lying on your side. Repeat on the opposite leg.
- **Calf Stretch**: Holding onto a chair or pressing your hands against a wall in front of you, place one foot back a foot or two and press your heel into the floor. Repeat on the opposite leg.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.