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Published on October 11, 2018

7 Killer Upper Back Stretches to Reduce Pain and Boost Endurance



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Building and maintaining a strong upper back depends not only on strength-training, but stretching and nutrition as well. Stretching the upper back muscles, along with a healthy diet can help alleviate pain while improving endurance.

Did you know that stretching your upper back builds endurance for sports, your job – which may require heavy lifting – and simple, everyday activities? Many people who exercise don't recognize the importance of having a strong upper back, and often neglect this part of the body, focusing more on the lower back where injuries are more prone to occur.

Upper back endurance is necessary for runners, hikers, golfers, tennis players, bowlers, cyclists; the list goes on and on. If saving time is important to you, you want to reduce chronic back pain, boost your energy levels, or you simply need ways to get through a day at the office while confined to a computer, you'll begin to understand why the following upper back stretches and exercises are necessary.

Here are seven stretches, combined with exercises, to help you maintain a strong upper back:

1. Lat Pull-Downs

By contracting and lengthening your latissimus dorsi muscles, trapezius, deltoids, rhomboids, teres major, along with the other muscles groups in and around your upper back, you are building muscle endurance and increasing mobility.

Seated at a lat pull-down machine, select a weight stack that is comfortable. Remember, you're not preparing for a bodybuilding competition, you just want to exercise the back, so heavy weight is unnecessary.

Grab the wide bar above your head, palms down, and using a wide grip, pull the bar down to your chest and contract your upper back muscles.

Keep your head up, looking at the bar. This also helps keep your spine straight and provides a clearance so that the bar doesn't hit your face. Slowly return the bar to the top and repeat for 15 reps. Do three to four sets.

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Here's the correct technique by Denice Moberg:



2. Indoor Rowing

If upright exercises like walking on the treadmill or running outdoors bore you, you can strengthen your core using a rowing machine. Not only will you chisel your back, but the elongation of the upper back during the stroke motion creates a good stretch.

First, select a tension that is challenging but not a struggle. Make sure that your feet are securely placed in the machine's foot straps, nice and tight to prevent the feet from moving while rowing.

Next, slide yourself in the rowing saddle forward toward the row bar and pull the bar toward the mid-section of your trunk area, which is the finish. Pulling the bar, bring your elbows beyond your back while contracting your upper muscles and rear shoulders.

Your back should be straight with a slight angle of around 100 degrees. Do not hunch.

During the catch, your legs should be at a 90 degree angle while locking out your arms completely. As a stretching exercise, repeat this motion for five minutes.

Here's how you can do it:



3. Side Plank Rotation

If you're short on time, floor exercises such as planks strengthen your core and can be done at home or during your lunch break at work. They can be done in 30 to 60 second increments.

There are a few plank variations:

The low-position forearm plank in which your body weight is supported by your elbows; the straight-arm plank, which is a high-position plank; side plank in which your body is turned to one side and supported by one straightened arm; the stability-ball plank which is more challenging for your trunk; and the plank that gives you a good stretch is the side plank rotation.

To begin the side plank rotation, begin in the high plank position. Slowly turn your body to one side while stacking one foot on top of the other. Extend the opposite arm toward the ceiling and as you lower your arm, reaching underneath your body and rotating your trunk.

Done properly, you will feel the stretch along your rhomboids and shoulders. Repeat the rotation – reaching and tucking – 10 times. Switch sides.

Here's a Side Plank Rotation demonstrated by Train Aggressive:



4. Yoga Stretches

A good way to incorporate breathing with stretching and gain flexibility in your core is Kundalini yoga – an intense yoga practice – gets your blood flowing and works wonders for the spine and posture.

The “Cat-Cow” pose is a great upper back warm-up, and when combined with the “Breath Of Fire”^[1] or “fast breathing,” energy is sent through the entire body which stimulates the flow of cell activity and increases lung capacity.

On all fours, arms straight and directly below your shoulders, and knees directly below your hips, hunch your back, inhaling as you tuck your head into your chest, then exhale while arching your back and raise your head toward to sky.

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The rapid inhaling and exhaling in this exercise is known as the “Breath Of Fire,” as mentioned above. Increase the pace of both the “Cat-Cow” and “Breath Of Fire” and repeat this movement for up to five minutes.

This is how to do a Cat-Cow pose for energy:



5. Side Bends

This is a simple stretch to elongate the space between your ribs and increase range of motion, which helps achieve flexibility in the abdominals, spine, and lateral core.

Seated or standing with your back straight, raise your arms above your head and firmly hold your wrist. Gently pull your trunk to one side and hold for 20 to 30 seconds. When finished, repeat on opposite side.

Note: If standing, keep your feet shoulder width apart, if seated keep your feet flat on the floor.

Let's take a look at how to do a standing side bend:





6. Pole Stretch

By creating opposing force and pulling on a stationary object, you are stretching your lats. The upper sides of your back. Here, you are performing a static stretch which is a stretch held beyond its normal range.

Find a pole, mounted gym apparatus, or other floor-affixed object and, while standing, pull on the object with slightly bent knees and back flat at a 45-degree angle.

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Continue to pull while extending your arms, feeling the stretch in your lats and rhomboid muscles. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat if needed.

7. Shoulder Blade Stretch

The shoulder blades are connected to the rhomboid muscles in the upper back. Sudden, quick movements like pulling a heavy object or even tossing a near-weightless object overhead, like a tennis ball during a serve, can strain the unstretched muscles between your shoulder blades, causing spasms.

Here's how to avoid muscle strain:

Standing tall with feet shoulder width apart, gently pull your elbow across your chest, just beneath your chin, and hold for 15 seconds. If you do not feel immediate relief, try lowering or raising the elbow and perform the stretch again. Different angles can make a big difference.





There you have it – Seven upper back stretches and exercises to reduce pain and improve endurance. But while upper back stretches are important, a diet rich in antioxidants is equally key.

Bonus Tip: Getting a Diet Rich in Antioxidants

Antioxidants, also known as “Super Foods,” prevent the build up of free radicals in your body and control oxidative stress. These free radicals are toxins that get in the way of endurance, flexibility, and cause inflammation, among other fitness obstacles.

How do you incorporate antioxidants into your diet? Here are some common foods and beverages rich in antioxidants:

- [Blueberries](#), raspberries, strawberries
- [Pomegranate](#)
- [Tomatoes](#)
- [Nuts](#)
- Spinach, [kale](#), collard greens, broccoli
- [Sweet potatoes](#)
- [Green tea](#)
- [Kombucha](#)
- [Whole grains](#)
- [Beans](#)
- Fish
- [Water](#)

A good combination of quick and easy targeted cardiovascular exercises, static stretches, range-of-motion stretches, and yoga poses can increase upper back endurance and boost your energy levels, making your activities – both sedentary and active – manageable and fun.

Once you begin to incorporate these methods of relief into your routine, you will begin to walk taller, run farther, and hike longer!

Reference

[1] ^Yogapedia: [Breath of Fire](#)



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Do you say “I’m exhausted” all the time? Do you constantly feel exhausted for no reason?

Fatigue shows up in many ways including pure exhaustion, the inability to concentrate, anger, frustration and behavioral issues, memory problems, decreased work performance, and slower reaction times. Chronic fatigue has also been linked to medical problems including obesity, hypertension, depression, diabetes, as well as increased automobile accidents.

We attempt to combat fatigue with coffee, sugar, energy drinks, vitamins and a variety of other products that claim to increase our energy and stamina. But what if your exhaustion is trying to tell you something?

If you're getting enough sleep and you're still feeling exhausted, it's time to stop, take a step back and look at what else is contributing to your exhaustion.

As a life-coach and consultant with a diverse background, I like to look at things from a holistic view – from multiple levels – including your body, mind and spirit.

So before you reach for that next cup of coffee, the 3pm sugary snack or the toxic energy drink, let's look at some other reasons why you might be tired all the time, and more importantly, what you can do about it.

Here are 11 potential reasons why you're exhausted even when get enough rest, and what you can do about it.

1. You are out of alignment mentally, emotionally or spiritually.

Essentially, you're off track with who you are and what works for you. Maybe you're unhappy, unfulfilled, stressed out or just plain bored with some areas of your life. You might be in a relationship that isn't working, a job you can't stand or a situation that drains your energy.

Think about a time in your life when you were in the flow, in the zone, and totally engaged and excited about what you were doing. How much sleep did you need then? Even after only a few hours, my guess is you probably found yourself jumping out of bed in the morning without an alarm clock, excited about embarking on the day.

On the flipside, think about a time in your life when you were in a relationship or job that zapped your energy. No matter how much sleep you got, you probably found it difficult to get out of bed in the morning and were tempted to hit that snooze button just a few more times.

We all have things that make us feel great and energized and things that completely zap our energy. Maybe you're someone who likes to move quickly but you're drowning in detail; maybe you're someone who thrives when you are on top of things and you're feeling like everything is completely out of control. Or maybe you thrive on spontaneity and variety and you're bored with your life.

When I asked my 11-year-old daughter why she thought people are tired even when we get enough rest, here's what she said.

"Maybe people are bored and so they're tired."

Ever wonder why you can't drag your kid out of bed for school on the weekdays but they pop out of bed on the weekend? Perhaps this is the culprit.

I had a client share this sentiment recently as she described a period of time in her life: *"My boss sucked, the work was boring and it made me tired all the time."*

Exactly.

When you're doing things that align with who you are, in environments that align with what you need, you will feel more energized and alive. On the contrary, when you're in environments that go against your grain, you will feel drained and de-energized.

What can you do?

Take a step back and identify what's not working. Figure out what you want and work towards it. Do things that give you energy.

What makes you feel healthy and alive, energized and excited? What gets you in the flow and makes you feel most like you? Aim to get more of that in your life.

Find more ways to be in alignment with who you are with these tips:

[How to Get Motivated and Be Happy Every Day When You Wake Up](#)

2. You are out of alignment physically.

When we are structurally out of alignment, it can cause all sorts of issues. When things aren't moving properly, it makes it hard for your body to do its job. Not to mention, pain is exhausting and zaps energy. And we are pretty hard on our bodies, aren't we? We drag them around and tell them what to do. They need to be taken care of too.

Here's what Chiropractor, Dr. Ruth Ziemba, who specializes in NSA (Network Spinal Analysis) has to say:

All of life is energy. We are energy. Any disturbance or blockages to the energy flow creates imbalances... Physical, mental and emotional stressors can cause subluxations (misalignment of the vertebrae) which interfere with signals getting clearly through your body. This can result in many health problems, including fatigue and insomnia.

Recently, I was feeling tired all the time – and felt like I was doing “everything else” right. So, I went to see my chiropractor and a cranial sacral therapist. Two days later, I felt much more energized and clear in my head.

I love the analogy I was once given by a chiropractor: “It doesn't matter how well you can play an instrument if the instrument is out of tune.”

Such is true with our bodies.

What can you do?

Get some body work. This might include getting a massage, acupuncture, chiropractic, reiki, cranial sacral therapy – anything that works for you.

Don't know where to start? Ask a friend or colleague for a recommendation. Even better if you have a friend in the field who can refer you to another practitioner. And make sure to schedule regular body work, not just when you need it.

3. You are not eating right (or enough).

What – and how much – you eat has a significant effect on your energy levels.

While there are many different diet protocols, there is one thing all the experts can agree on: sugar and processed foods make you feel sluggish and exhausted. They make your blood sugar go haywire, causing you to feel a brief period of energy followed by a crash.

Paradoxically, those are the very things we reach for when we need a hit of energy.

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What can you do?

I've found two things to be consistently true:

One, you need to eat real, [clean food](#). The food you're putting into your body is either real or it's not. Avoid processed foods and especially refined sugars. You're going to feel so much better for it.

Two, find what works for YOU. Gluten-free, Paleo, Mediterranean, high-fat, plant-based, you name it. Experts and well-meaning friends and family may tell you what's best, but no one knows your body as well as you do. Pay attention, do you feel energized or fatigued after you eat certain foods? What works – and what doesn't for YOU? Our bodies have intrinsic wisdom if we are willing to listen – and hear them.

4. You are not really sleeping.

We've established that you're (hopefully) getting enough sleep. But are you getting enough high-quality sleep?

Some of the top causes of poor sleep quality include: being on electronics right before bed, interruptions, an uncomfortable mattress or the wrong pillow, grinding your teeth, an inconsistent sleep routine or the fact that you're not getting through all of the [sleep cycles](#).

What can you do?

Start with the basics:

Get off your electronics at least an hour before bed, make sure you have a comfortable pillow and mattress, set a consistent sleep routine, reduce outside noise and sleep in a well-darkened room or wear an eye mask.

If you have difficulty falling asleep or have poor sleep quality, this guide will help you get a good night's sleep back:

[Poor Sleep Quality Comes from All the Things You Do Since Morning](#)

5. You are stressed or worrying too much.

When you're stressed, you produce more cortisol (the stress hormone), which can significantly affect your sleep.^[1] This is why one of the common side effects of stress is sleep problems.

On top of stress hormones, excessive worry can drain your energy. When you worry, you're using energy. It's like when you have an app on your phone that takes up a lot of battery and you have it constantly running the background, your battery will drain more quickly. Such is true with worry and stress.

I think of this very simply. We all start the day with 100 units of energy to use throughout the day. If you're using half of your energy units worrying, you're inevitably going to be tired.

What can you do?

Find things that reduce your stress levels. I've seen clients have great success with [yoga](#), [meditation](#) and exercise. Worrying too much? Get a clear plan in place to take action on what's worrying you.



6. You are not breathing deeply enough.

Deep breathing increases circulation by bringing oxygen to your muscles and brain. This increased oxygen content in the bloodstream leads to greater energy and healthier muscles, organs and tissues.

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To highlight the benefits of deep breathing, I reached out to longtime Yoga Instructor & Ayurveda Wellness Counselor, Vivica Schwartz. Here's what she shared:^[2]

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“Most people breathe in to the chest only (shallow breathing) and don't allow the breath to reach deeper into the abdominal region, due to stress and anxiety. Shifting the breath down, so that it expands the belly (and all the muscles that comprise the diaphragm) is one of the best ways to shift our awareness, quiet the mind, release tension and increase our energy levels”.

What happened when you started to read this one? Did you start breathing more deeply? Great, you're already on your way.

What can you do?

Make a conscious effort to breathe deeply, more often. Try this from Vivica:

1. Place one hand on your chest and the other on your lower belly.
2. Breathe smoothly in and out through the nose, noticing how your breath expands three-dimensionally in the ribcage.
3. Now begin to shift the inhalation into the lower abdomen first, so that the lower hand rises first, then fill the chest area.
4. Reverse the process on the exhalation, emptying the chest area first, then the lower belly.
5. Continue like this for a few rounds, visualizing the diaphragm contracting and pushing down and expanding the belly area.

7. You are hanging out with the wrong crowd.

Have you ever known someone who “sucks the life out of you”? After spending time together, you feel tired, drained and exhausted? “Energy vampires” do just that, they suck your energy. It doesn’t matter how much sleep you’re getting; if you’re spending time with people who drain your energy, you’re going to feel tired.

What can you do?

Grab some garlic and your stake and ditch the energy vampires. Make a conscious effort to hang out with people who feed your soul and make you feel energized and alive.

If you need a little help to spot these people out, here it is: [15 Signs Of Negative People](#)

8. You are not moving.

There’s been a lot of research conducted over many years that shows physical activity and exercise improves energy and decreases fatigue.

In a widely acknowledged 2006 study published in *Psychological Bulletin*, researchers analyzed 70 studies on exercise and fatigue which involved more than 6,800 people. Over 90% of the studies showed the same thing: Sedentary people who completed a regular exercise program reported improved fatigue compared to those that did not exercise.

What can you do?

Get moving! Find ways to increase your exercise and movement. General guidelines are 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity (or a combination of the two). This can be as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking 20 minutes a day or participating in a sport you enjoy.

Here’re some tips for you: [How to Instantly Fall in Love With Moving and Start Shaking off the Extra Pounds](#)

9. You are dehydrated.

The human body is composed of 50-65% water. Some parts of our bodies, like our brain, heart and lungs are more than 70% water. This means even mild dehydration can cause your energy levels to fall.

Fatigue is a telltale sign you are dehydrated. In fact, in a survey of 300 doctors in the UK, 1 in 5 patients who saw their doctor for symptoms such as fatigue and tiredness simply weren’t drinking enough water.

What can you do?

First and foremost, drink enough water. A simple rule of thumb is eight 8-ounce glasses per day. And before you reach for your coffee in the morning, reach for a glass of water first.

However, Doctor and hydration expert Dr. Zach Bush noted,

“Proper hydration is not simply infusing your body with water. More specifically, it’s about getting the water inside your cells. To do that, you need to improve the electrical charges across your cellular membranes. Strategies that improve the electrical charge across your membranes include: reducing EMF (electromagnetic field) exposure, increasing electrolytes, and boosting your fiber intake.”

So, try this intensive hydration protocol: Drink 4 ounces of water every 30 minutes from 7am-7pm for 3 days. During this intense hydration, add electrolytes to every other 4-ounce dose. Then give your body a break from food and water between 7pm and 7am.

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Learn more about intracellular hydration with Dr. Bush [here](#) .

10. You are too busy.

You know the saying, “If you want something done, ask a busy person.” I say, leave the busy person alone. They clearly have enough on their plate.

I work with many clients, especially moms, who wonder why they are so tired all the time. When I ask them to tell me about “a day in their life”, I get something like this: 6am wake-up , exercise, get the kids off to school, work, drive to after-school activities, get dinner on the table, do housework, coordinate schedules, bath and bed time (for the kids of course), and then back to work after the kids go to bed. And they wonder why they are tired?

I get it. I’ve been there and I have to be careful of this myself. As a working mom of three young girls, who also wants to be social and active in my community, I know all too well the life of being busy. I’ve had to reign it in, create strategies and make very conscious decisions.

What can you do?

Look at your life as an outside observer or “fly on the wall”. What do you notice? Maybe you need to learn to say no? Perhaps you need to take a step back and identify what’s most important? Or set better boundaries?

Perhaps you need to delegate more, outsource or just get some stuff off YOUR plate! Take just ONE thing and start from there.

If you want extra advice on this, check out this guide:

[The Ultimate Guide to Prioritizing Your Work And Life](#)

11. There is something else going on.

If you’ve tried everything above, you are getting enough sleep and you are still tired, you may want to see your doctor or healthcare professional to uncover any underlying issues.

Amongst other things, what leads to exhaustion could be medication side effects and other health concerns including thyroid and adrenal dysfunction, anemia and sleep apnea.

What can you do?

Talk to your doctor. Seriously. Make an appointment.

If you’re sleeping enough and doing all the “right” things above and you still feel tired, it’s important to identify what could be the cause.

The bottom line

If you're sleeping enough and still find yourself tired and exhausted all the time, it's time to step back and see which of these reasons resonate with you.

In order to get a different result, you have to DO something differently. In order to be more energized and less exhausted, you're going to need to make some changes.

What changes will you make? Are you going to eat better, exercise more, stay hydrated, take something off your plate, reassess the job you hate or relationship that's draining you?

Take a few minutes right now and think of 1-3 things you're going to try. Write them down in your journal, on your phone or send an email to yourself.

Change takes action and it's time for change. You've got this. Take action now and your energy levels will be glad you did!



Reference

[1] ^Dr. Doni: [How Cortisol Affects Your Sleep](#)

[2] ^[Vivica Schwartz](#), Yoga Instructor & Ayurveda Wellness Counselor



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