

HEALTHY OFFICE HABITS

The smallest changes can have the biggest impact

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I'm Dr. Karen Quinn

No matter what environment we work in, we all encounter different types of stress. Some we can control, some may be unavoidable. My intent with this e-book is to bring awareness to those things we can modify to offset the incoming stress as much as possible.



Often it is the daily micro-traumas or behaviours that in and of themselves do not create significant issue, however when these become repetitive over days, weeks, months or – lets face it – years, our body can start to adapt, respond inefficiently, and at times can lead to more significant symptoms or problems. This is not an exclusive list of tips, however hopefully it sparks some insight and inspiration around what we can do starting today!

STRETCH & STRENGTHEN SEATED

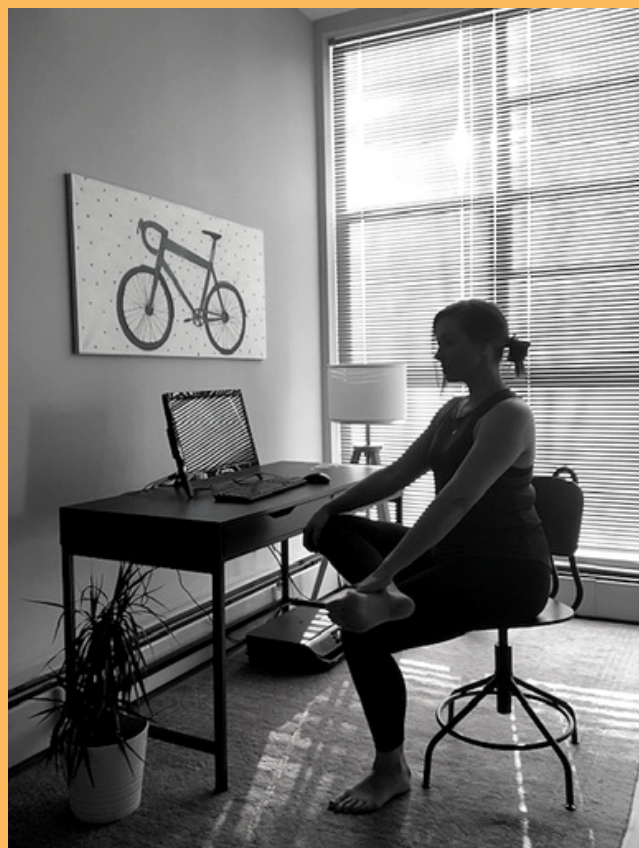
Goal: Encourage movement of the spine, open common areas of tightness and strengthen areas that can become weakened with repetitive office-related postures.

Seated Reset

Upon sitting and periodically through your day, hinge forward at your hips allowing your “sit” bones (tail) to tilt behind you.

Keeping the pelvis in place, stack your torso back over your pelvis. A gentle low back curve should be present.

If you’ve been slouching, this new position will likely feel taller and lighter.



Hips

Sitting tall (see previous), cross right ankle over L knee. Keep a gentle flexion in your ankle to protect your knee .

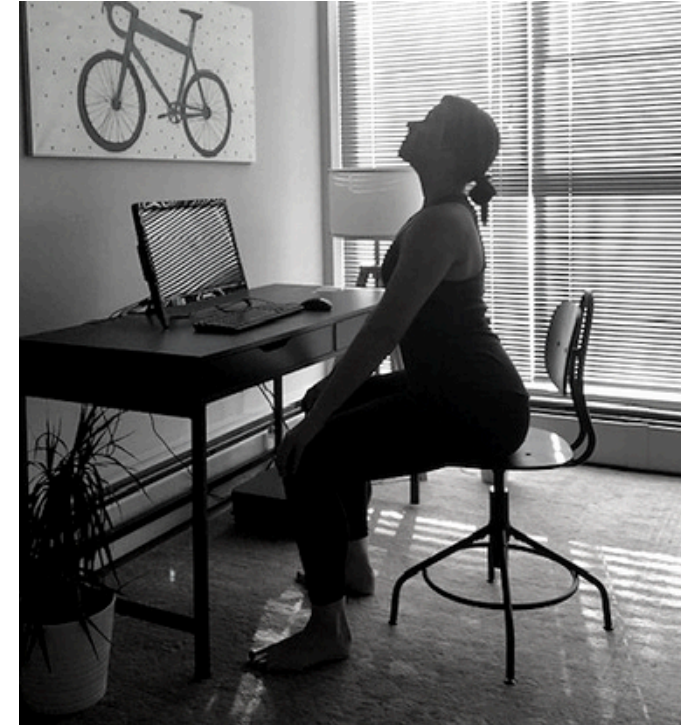
If this produces a stretch in your R hip, stay here. Otherwise, hinge forward over your crossed leg until a stretch is felt.

Repeat on opposite side.

Spine Flex and Extend

Sitting up tall with a natural low back curve:

- place hands on knees
- upon inhale, pull gently into hands, pull and lift chest forward, creating gentle arch in low back and drawing shoulder blades together
- with exhale, contract into abdomen, dropping chin and rounding tailbone under with exhale, rounding through the upper back. Repeat 5-8 times.



Spine Rotation

- Place right hand on chair behind you - lift and rotate chest and belly button to the right, placing left hand on right knee - Hold for 3 full breaths and repeat on opposite side.



Shoulder & Chest Openers

Sitting tall, extend arms up and out like a star.

Lift chin and heart up, and gently squeeze shoulder blades together and extend as if bending back over a beach ball. You can allow the low back to arch also if comfortable. Take 5 slow breaths allowing the rib cage to lift and expand



Move seat back so you can hinge at your hips

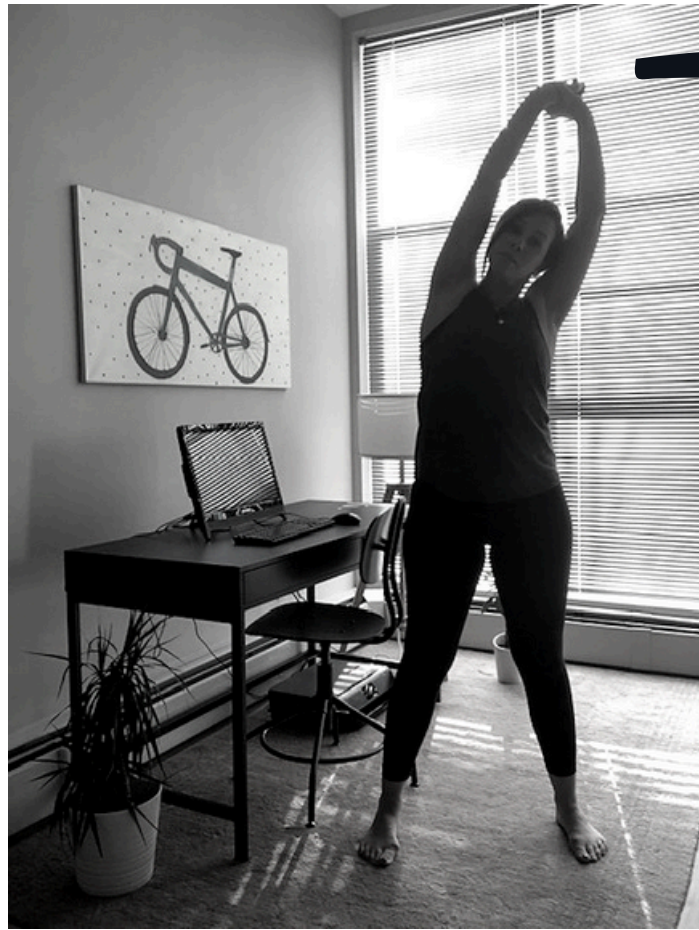
a) place hands on desk in a wide push up position. Lower chest allowing for a gentle stretch across chest

b) move chair back further, hinge at hips, reach your arms forward in a “Y” shape with straight (but not locked) elbows and place your hands on your desk, allowing your chest to sink toward the floor

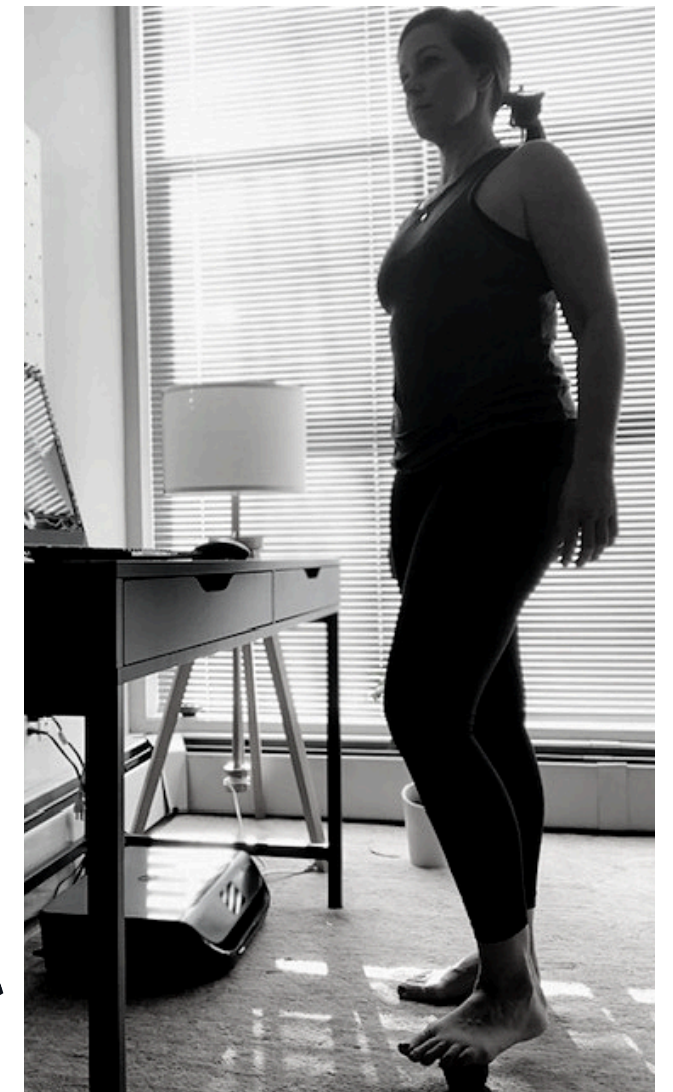


STRETCH & STRENGTHEN STANDING

Spine & Feet



- Standing with equal weight between your two feet, find balance between your heels and balls of your feet, avoiding gripping with your toes
- Reach arms overhead. Grasp right wrist with left hand
- Lift toward sky and gently bend to the left.
- Ensure you are getting a gentle bend through your entire spine not just your low back or shoulders
- Hold 3-5 breaths. Contract in your right side muscles to return to center and repeat on the opposite side.



Rolling your feet daily is a great way to encourage the connective tissue along your back line (bottoms of feet, backs of legs, up the back of your spine to your skull) to remain unrestricted.

- Stand with one bare foot resting on a small ball*
- Gently roll your foot over the ball across the entire surface.
- Next, concentrate on rolling through the heel, ball of the foot and both sides of the feet, spending more time if you feel tightness or restriction
- Finish with a roll through the entire surface again
- Pressure is a combination of compression and a tractioning of the skin

* Best with a ball with some grip and mild “squish“. A golf ball is too hard, a Tennis ball can work but may easily break with too much pressure.

STRETCH & STRENGTHEN FLOOR

Chest

This stretch has a few versions and is held for a longer time to ensure opening through the connective tissue (fascia) not just the muscles. It should be gentle, and comfortable so you are able to completely relax without muscle engagement.

1- Lay on floor with legs propped on a chair or couch so that knees and hips can be about 90 deg. This allows the low back to relax. Rest arms PALMS UP at about 45 degrees along sides. Stay here 10-20 minutes. If this is held easily with no stretch across the chest, proceed to the next version(s).

2- With same leg setup as above, place arms in the shape of a football goal post, with elbows out from shoulders, palms up and forearms resting on floor. Ensure shoulder blades are tucked under your upper back to reduce forward rounding of the shoulders. Once set, relax. No need to push shoulders down. Check that lower ribs aren't flaring up. Elevating the legs should help keep the lower ribs down. The back of the head should contact the floor and the chin should not be pointing to the sky.

If this is too challenging (usually due to a posture with significant forward head posture), place a rolled towel or small pillow behind your neck until you are able to have proper head placement. Make sure the support isn't pushing your head further forward than necessary. If fingers go tingly or arms hover creating stress on your shoulders, bring arms back down along your sides.



Back



Laying face down on the floor, tuck chin slightly to allow length through the back of your neck and allow your forehead to gently contact the floor. If the low back is sore in this position: try contracting your glutes, tucking your toes under, widening legs or doing this seated or against a wall.

1. Rest hands gently beside shoulders with elbows tucked into the side ribs like grasshopper legs.

With your forehead gently resting, squeeze between shoulder blades to allow hands to hover on floor. Hold 3-5 breaths, avoiding tension in the neck or excess pressure in the forehead. Return to starting position.

2. With hands remaining GENTLY in contact with the floor, hover forehead for 3-5 breaths and return to rest.

3. Lift both head and hands as described above at the same time, 3-5 breaths, return to rest.

4. If the above are able to be done with proper back activation and minimal neck strain, you can increase intensity by hovering (head is optional and will add further challenge) arms out to sides in the shape of a “W”. Elbows will be slightly away from the ribs, forearms parallel to the floor with palms down. With control, slowly straighten arms into a “Y” shape and then return to starting position. Repeat 3-5 times with NO neck strain and ensuring engagement of upper back is maintained throughout.



Shoulders

1. With hips stacked over knees as in tabletop position, walk your hands forward on the floor.

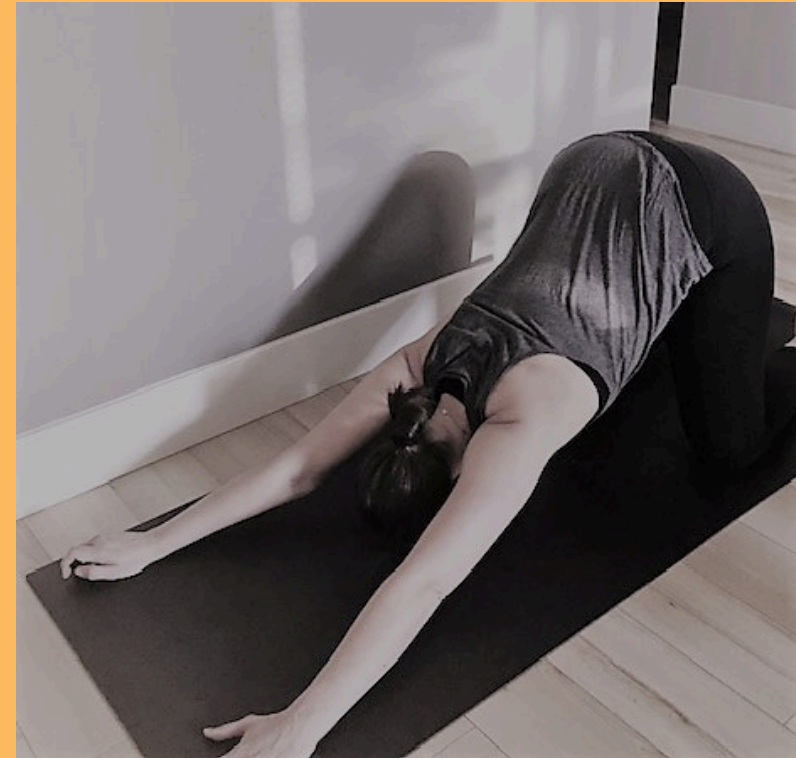
GENTLY press chest toward the floor allowing opening through the shoulders, chest and extension through the upper back.

Hold for 3-5 breaths.

To isolate each shoulder (or for a more gentle version), stack hips over knees as above. Extend one hand in front on the floor and rest the other forearm on the floor under your head. Gently press chest down toward the floor.

2. Starting on all 4's in a tabletop position:

- Raise right arm, opening chest to the right
- Reach the right arm under the left shoulder and gently place arm on floor. Head may contact the floor but should not be supporting any body weight.
- Left hand can remain on the floor next to your head with a bent elbow, or reach left arm forward resting hand on floor.
- Repeat on opposite side.



ADDITIONAL DAILY STRATEGIES:

1 - Move!

When working from home we miss out on the minimal movement we get from simply commuting and going to a workplace. Movement throughout the day should be considered a non-negotiable.

- a) Add an additional 20 minutes (minimum) of movement in your day. Get your heart rate up, incorporate strengthening and flexibility .
- b) If possible, move your at-home work set up around when working from a laptop. Try to incorporate standing and sitting into your work day . If shifting a workstation is not modifiable, taking a break to stand or stretch once an hour is helpful.
- c) Think about moving every joint in your body every day. This may seem obvious but you may be surprised how restricted areas can become with our daily repetitive postures. As for the spine, it has six ranges of motion to consider: forward fold, bending backward, bending to the side right and left and rotating to the side right and left. Imbalance in the body often can show up as asymmetry of motion side to side.
- d) Throughout the day, choose 1-3 stretches to do to counter the postural position of computer work. Switch them up through the day to add variety.

2 - Hydrate!

Drinking water throughout the day is not a new recommendation. Adequate hydration is required for all cell functions, and is lost with sweat, breathing and other body elimination. For some, it can be difficult to remember to consume enough.

Some tips:

- Have a cup of water or hot water with lemon, first thing in the morning. Also have one with every meal and right before bed. By doing this you are automatically going to be consuming 4-5 glasses.
- Have a bottle of water at your work station. Fill it before you start, maybe with a slice of lemon or frozen fruit. Using a large cup with a reusable straw can also make quick sips more likely and over time you may find it easier to consume more!

3 - Mental & Eye Breaks

Hours can fly by when working on a project, focused on a deadline, in a good work flow or without a defined schedule. Taking periodic breaks to move will provide mental and eye breaks.

The 20/20/20 rule is a good strategy. Every 20 minutes look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

Mini breathing exercises can also be a great break to wake you up and calm your mind.

4 - Maintain a Schedule/ Routine

We all have different needs for how much structure we work best with. If you feel you have time for all of the things you need/ want to get done on an average day you may already have this down. What often happens though is that work , family needs or distractions can occupy a significant amount of time and we find ourselves dropping things that will support us most, such as exercising, meal prep, or meditating. When working from home this can be even more challenging.

If this is a struggle for you, try this:

- Turn on your lights as soon as your alarm goes off. The light will help you wake up!
- Make your bed upon waking. This not only makes it less tempting to crawl back in, but congrats! You've done one thing already today :)
- Drink a glass of water or hot water with lemon. Follow with your morning coffee or tea if this is part of your routine , but water first!
- Before you sit in front of your computer do minimum 5 minute of mobility. This may be a brief yoga sequence, one or more of the stretches previously suggested or going for a walk.
- Set an alarm if needed to ensure a change of position and movement every hour (max).
- Make sure you eat! Have healthy snacks on hand and if needed, maintain a scheduled lunch hour and end time for your workday.

5 - Office Setup

There are some commonly shared ergonomic suggestions for those working at a computer throughout their day. In a perfect world, we would have access to work spaces that accommodate custom computer screen positions, the ability to sit or stand (and change between the two), and adjust chair height & tilt. When working from home, or in an office with limited workspace modifiers it isn't always that easy.

Here are some simple things you can do to minimize strain:

- If working on a laptop, if possible, try to use a second keyboard. Whether it connects with USB or bluetooth, this allows you to prop the screen up at proper eye level so that you aren't compromising your neck to see the screen or your wrists and shoulders to access the keys.
- If you are working from a laptop and are unable to create an ideal ergonomic setup, then when possible, move your workstation. If you're working from your kitchen table, move to the island, couch or floor to allow a change of body position through the day. Variety of positions is helpful, even if they aren't "perfect", as long as we are striving for the best option for what is available to us!
- If you are standing for long periods of time, have a footstool or something you can rest one foot on at a time to unload your joints (be sure to switch which leg/ foot is supported). If you have a cushy mat to stand on even better!

Find me online



Instagram

@drkarenquinn



LinkedIn

@drkarenquinn

Please note, exercises and tips are not a replacement for professional consult. If you have pain or injury, not all postures may be right for you. If you experience pain or limitation during or after any of the listed stretches or strengthening exercises please stop and consult your Chiropractor, Physical Therapist, Personal trainer or Medical Doctor to determine if modifications are warranted.

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No furniture or ergonomics will make up for the need for the body to move through the day.

Sustained and/ or repetitive positions must be interrupted or changed for best physical (and mental) outcomes. Of all the things out of our control, movement is up to us!