

Stretch Out

A few precautions can prevent future pain

Kelli Crosby

You brush your teeth daily because you don't want cavities or gum disease, right? Well, what do you do on a daily basis to prevent tension in your neck? Brushing your teeth offers you preventive dental care, but what if you could learn to be preventive with the rest of your body?

We all have bad daily habits we don't even notice until something starts to hurt. These bad habits are the root cause of many painful conditions. To help prevent pain, however, we can turn these bad habits into good habits that can be worked into our daily routine. Here is some general advice that can apply to almost every part of daily living.

Sit Up Straight.

Sit in a chair with your hands on your hips. Slouch. Feel how your hips roll back (if you're wearing jeans, you'll be sitting on your pockets). Now sit up straight by moving your pelvis forward and centering your weight over your pelvis and off your buttocks.

Sleep on Your Back or Side.

Sleeping on your stomach makes you twist your neck and body in order to breathe. This twisted position is terrible for your spine, especially for prolonged periods during sleep. Check your pillow and make sure it has a thickness that will support your neck in a position neutral to the rest of your spine. Try a

If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn't lead anywhere.

-Frank A. Clark



Even just a few minutes at work can help turn bad habits into good ones.

Don't Slouch.

Slouching puts strain on your neck and can give you a headache. Your head weighs roughly 10 pounds-about as much as a bowling ball. Your spine is designed to balance that bowling ball when you're in an upright posture. If you slouch, your muscles have to do more work to hold your head up, which makes your muscles tight and angry.

memory-foam contour pillow, especially if you are a side sleeper.

Bend with a Straight Spine.

Bending over with a curved back puts pressure on your disc material and strains the spine. The pressure created during incorrect bending can cause the

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Marie Kokinos

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discs to bulge and put pressure on spinal nerves. Your back was not made to lower and raise your body—that's what your buttocks, hips, and knees are for.

Stand with your knees shoulder-width apart and pretend you are going to lift a 50-pound box off the floor. If you are bending your knees and hips and using your legs to lower and raise your body weight, you are lifting correctly. Now, use the same technique to pick your shoes up off the floor. Think about a squatting movement when you need to lean forward, too—such as while washing your face in the sink. Let your hips and knees do the work.

Take Regular Stretch Breaks.

The muscles in your arms and hands get tight when you grip or pull. The muscles in your neck and shoulders get tight when you reach forward or away from your body. Give these muscles a break with a simple stretch.

It only takes 10 seconds to lengthen the tight tissue, which will take pressure off your joints and prevent chronic conditions like tendinitis and bursitis. Watch for opportunities to work in a brief stretch.

Undo Yourself.

Evaluate the position of your body during your daily activities and make sure you "undo" that position during the day. There is no way to teach a stretch for every single activity you do, but if you take the time to reverse the position of the joint and stretch in the opposite direction, you will lengthen tight tissue and reduce repetitive strain on joints.

Tips to Save Your Body

Replacing bad habits with good ones takes time and thought, but the effort is well worth it. Here are some helpful tips to keep you on track.

-- If you keep waking up on your stomach, wear a pair of gym shorts to bed and put a golf ball in each pocket. When you roll onto your stomach, the golf balls will wake you up and you can return to your back or side.

-- When unloading the dishwasher and getting laundry out of the machine, pose

like a tennis player waiting for a serve. The knees are over your toes (but not beyond the toes), buttocks are backward, and shoulders are forward.

-- Don't try to carve out 30 minutes daily for a stretching routine. If you stretch regularly throughout the day, you will be more effective at keeping tissue loose. Remember, it only takes 10 seconds to stretch a muscle—so find those seconds during your day and make the most of them.

-- Think about stretching the same way you think about hydration. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink water; by then you're already dehydrated. If you wait until something hurts before you stretch, you could develop chronic tension that can lead to everything from a headache to tendinitis.

A daily stretching routine will help

prevent future issues and address current ones. Don't wait until it's a problem. Start stretching today and, little by little, your body will thank you.

Kelli Crosby is the author of How to Think Like a Physical Therapist in Your Everyday Life.

She graduated in 1999 from the University of North Florida and completed her specialty certification in orthopedic manipulative therapy in 2006.



Stretching for 10 seconds can take pressure off your joints and help relieve pain.

Healthy Energy Boosters

Tips to Staying Energized and Alert

Rebecca Jones

Here are some tips for keeping your energy levels up.

Snack Smart

Strategic snacking can be a good way to smooth out dips in your energy level and avoid hunger cravings that can lead you to overeat. Go ahead and snack---just be as choosy in your snack selection as you are in meal planning.

Grab an Energy Bar

Don't fall for the fiction that all so-called "energy bars" are unpalatable but good for you. A lot of energy bars are filled with chemicals and with sugar, so read labels, and look for high fiber, high protein, and limited carbs.

Pick-Me-Up Snacks

Nuts such as almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, and hazelnuts are among the best choices for healthy, pick-me-up snacks, nutritionists say.

Stay Hydrated

Even slight dehydration can leave you

tired and lethargic. The answer is, of course, to drink plenty of water. If the taste of plain water doesn't excite you, consider some of the flavored varieties, keeping in mind that loads of extra sugar should be avoided.

Get Your Beauty Sleep

The number one myth about sleep is that you can get by on six hours a night, but the further away you deviate from getting eight hours sleep a night---and some people get too much, not too little---the greater the risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, obesity, and a host of other maladies.

Avoid Caffeine, Get to Sleep

Caffeine is a great pick-me-up first thing in the morning, but it has a six- to seven-hour "half-life," meaning that half the caffeine in that cup of coffee you consumed to ward off the 3:00 p.m. doldrums will still be lingering in your bloodstream after the 10:00 p.m. news.

Rebecca Jones is a Denver-based freelance writer.



Stay hydrated to keep energy up.

Fabulous Figs

This little known fruit is rich in beauty benefits

Shelley Burns

As one of the oldest fruits enjoyed by humans, figs have a known history dating back to 9200 BCE in the Middle East. Part of the fig's mythology was that it had medicinal properties, like building muscle, enhancing fertility, and increasing stamina. Figs were considered a valuable gift in ancient times because of beliefs about these and other medicinal benefits.

Figs are enjoyed in Mediterranean countries, a region that has one of the healthiest diets in the world. Mediterranean cultures appreciate the nutritional potential of the fig, the benefits of which have been overlooked far too long in North America.

Figs are being used today to hydrate skin and restore its elasticity and firmness. They also help prevent cracked lips and

premature wrinkling. Figs have excellent hydration properties, since each has a water content of approximately 3/4 of a cup.

Alpha hydroxy acid (AHA) is used to refresh and brighten skin and is often used as an ingredient in skin exfoliation. Figs have natural AHA properties, and when ingested, behave somewhat like internal exfoliants. They also promote healthy digestion.

This ancient fruit also contains ficin, an antioxidant enzyme more powerful than papain (the active ingredient in papaya) for its ability to repair skin and slow aging.

Dried figs consist of a great source of soluble and insoluble fiber. Insoluble fiber has been shown to reduce

low-density lipoprotein (LDL), better known as bad cholesterol. Keep in mind that dried figs are high in natural sugars and should be used with caution if you have high blood sugar levels or diabetes.

Update your thinking on figs. They are not only a great source of fiber, but they are also a wonderful skin-enhancing resource.

Shelley Burns, a doctor of naturopathic medicine, completed studies at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, and has certification in complementary and integrative medicine from Harvard University.

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experience to put
a premium on
those few people
who can
appreciate you
for what you are*

-Gail Godwin

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