



Sore From a Long Day at Work? Try These 13 Desk Yoga Poses to Fight Stiffness

By Megan Edwards
April 25 2023

It's no secret that sitting at a desk for eight hours a day takes a toll on your body. Numerous studies—including a [2017 analysis](#) of nearly 8,000 American adults published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*—have linked extended durations of sedentary behavior with higher mortality rates and chronic illnesses. [Health experts recommend](#) moving your body as much as you can throughout the day to counteract the negative effects of sitting for long periods of time; but when the modern workday is structured around computer screens, how can we do our jobs and stay active at the same time?

We've rounded up the best desk yoga poses to help loosen up your muscles and fight off the stiffness that inevitably comes from sitting all day. These stretches use just a single office chair and are broken down into three sections to cover the main areas of the body that wind up feeling sore from an office job: the shoulders/neck, the hips, and the legs/low back. So whether you have a problem area that leaves you with chronic pain or you want a full-body stretch sesh, give a few of these handy desk yoga poses a go!

Tip: These stretches are best performed in an armless chair so you can achieve a full range of movement.

Shoulders and Neck

Do you ever catch yourself hunching over your phone or laptop with your chin and neck pushed forward? This hunched posture is also known as “tech neck” and can lead to [serious issues](#) in the cervical spine. When our spine moves out of alignment for prolonged periods of time it can pull on our muscles, ligaments, and tendons, creating that familiar “tight shoulder” feeling that so many of us experience after a long day at the computer. Use the desk yoga poses below to open the upper body and prevent pain in your neck from causing injuries down the road.

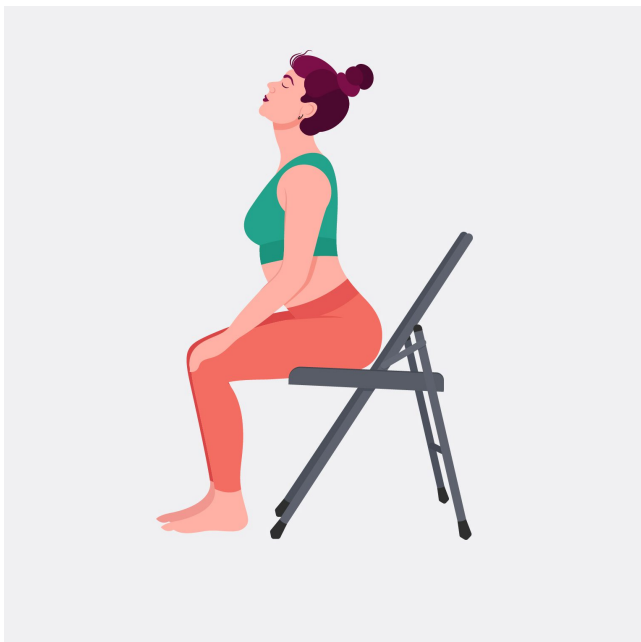
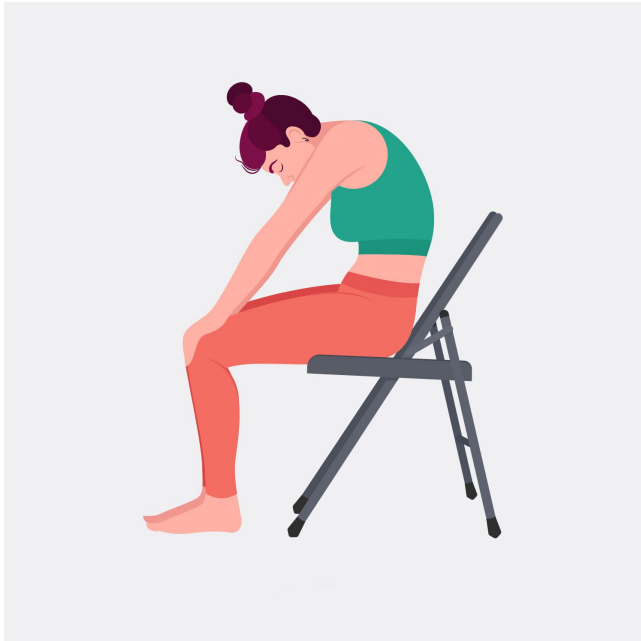
Seated Cat/Cow Sequence

This seated stretch is great for helping you get the hunch out of your shoulders and for preventing knots from forming around your shoulder blades.

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1. Place your feet on the floor and sit with your spine straight and tall. Rest your hands on your knees.
2. Begin your Seated Cat by rounding your upper back, tucking your chin into your chest, and straightening your arms. You should feel like the space between your shoulder blades is very broad and that your tailbone is tucking underneath you.
3. Move into your Seated Cow by pressing your chest forward, squeezing your shoulder blades behind your back, and lifting your face up toward the ceiling. Your arms might bend here, and it should feel like your tailbone is jutting slightly out behind you.
4. Try a few rounds of connecting these two movements to your breath by exhaling into Cat and inhaling into Cow.

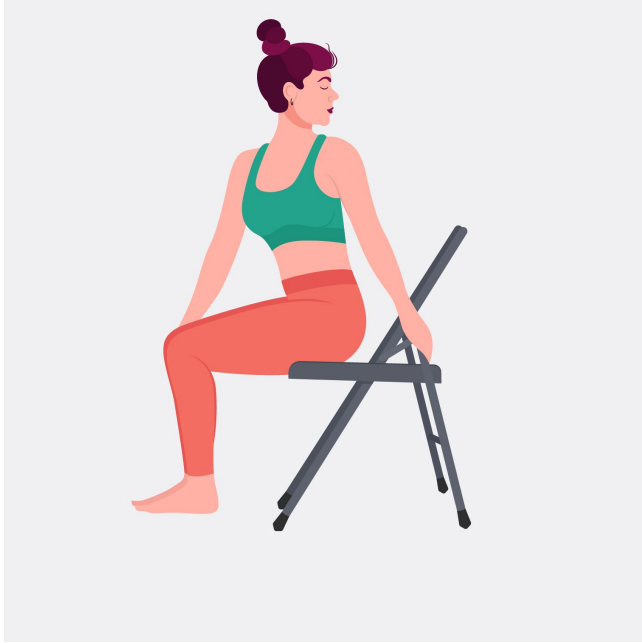
Seated Spinal Twist

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Try this stretch at your desk whenever your neck gets tight and you haven't changed position in more than half an hour.



1. Sit on the edge of your chair with your feet on the floor and your spine straight and tall. Rest your hands on your knees.
2. Gently rotate your torso to the left and place your right hand on your left thigh. Your left hand can reach behind you to grab onto the back of the chair, or you can tuck it behind your back. Look over your left shoulder and continue to engage your core so your spine stays tall as you twist.
3. Repeat on the other side by placing your left hand on your right thigh and looking over your right shoulder.
4. Hold each twist for 10 to 30 seconds and repeat at least twice on both sides. Notice if you can move a little deeper into the twist every time you exhale by allowing your muscles to relax and soften.

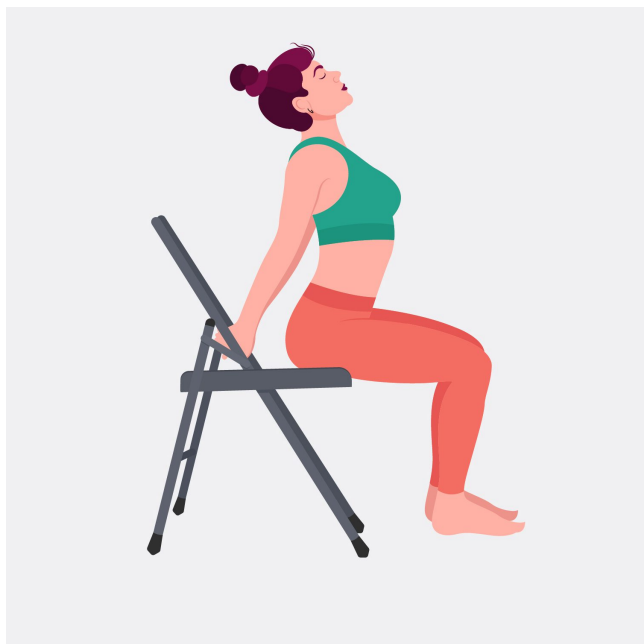
Seated Chest Opener

This posture is ideal for people who chronically slouch forward and round the vertebrae in the upper back.

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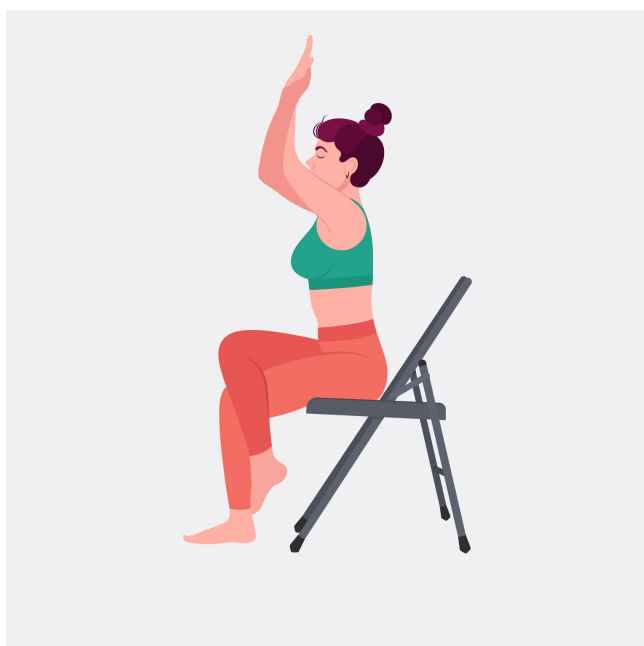
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1. Sit on the edge of your chair, with your feet on the floor and your spine straight and tall.
2. Clasp your hands behind your back and interlace your fingers together so that your hands can rest on the small of your back.
3. Press your chest forward, straighten your arms, and lift your hands off your back by pressing them away from you. Tilt your face up toward the ceiling.
4. Notice whether you can take big, full breaths as you hold this stretch for 10 to 30 seconds.

Seated Eagle

This dynamic desk stretch is great for opening the upper back, neck, and outside of the hips.



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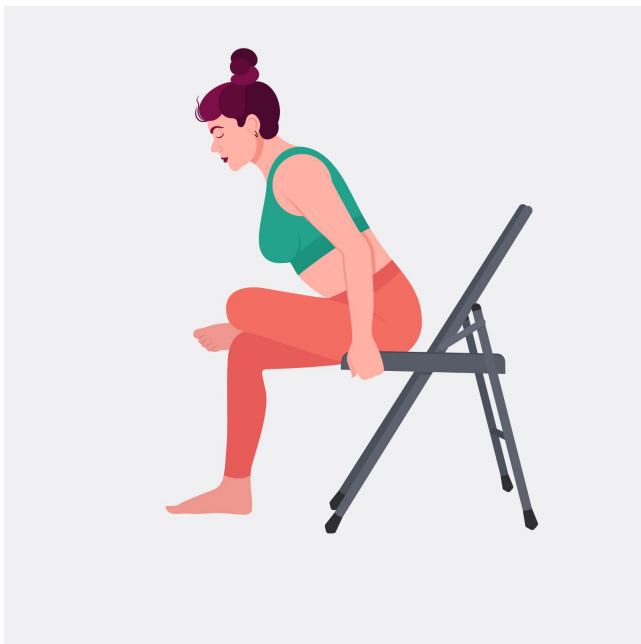
1. Place your feet on the floor and sit with your spine straight and tall.
2. Cross your right leg over your left so that your thighs are touching. Your right foot can dangle off to the side or you can wrap your toes around the back of your left calf.
3. Reach both arms out in front of you and cross your right arm underneath your left so your elbows are stacked on top of each other. Bend at your elbows with fingers moving up toward the ceiling. Stay here or wrap your right palm around your left palm so that your hands touch.
4. Move your elbows away from your chest and up toward the ceiling to increase the stretch across the back of your shoulder blades. Keep your core engaged so your spine doesn't round.
5. Repeat on the other side by crossing your left thigh over your right and your left arm underneath your right arm.
6. Hold each side for 10 to 30 seconds and imagine breathing into the space between your shoulder blades.

Hips

Sitting in an upright position for hours at a time causes your hip flexors to shorten and stiffen up, which can pull lots of other surrounding muscles out of alignment. If your pelvis and glutes feel particularly sore at the end of the day, try to incorporate these stretches several times throughout your shift to leave work feeling more loose and relaxed.

Seated Figure-4 Fold

Use this seated desk yoga pose to target your glutes, hamstrings, and outer hips after a long day of sitting at your desk.



1. Place your feet on the floor and sit with your spine straight and tall.
2. Cross your right leg over your left so that your ankle is pressing into the top of your thigh. Keep the foot on your crossed leg flexed to protect your knee joint.
3. Reach down to grab the seat of your chair with both hands and hinge slightly forward from your hips while maintaining a flat back. Keep your neck in line with your spine.
4. Repeat on the opposite side by crossing your left ankle over your right thigh and leaning forward. Hold each side for 30 to 60 seconds and feel free to repeat several times.

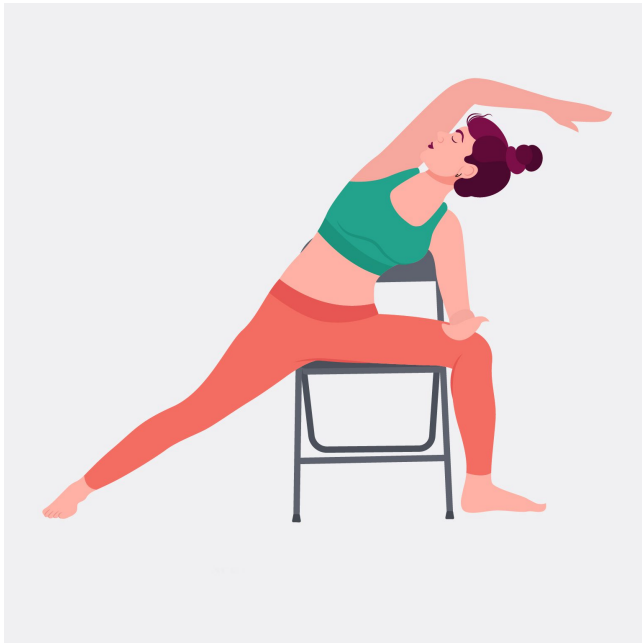
Seated Side Angle

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This supported [yoga pose](#) is excellent for stretching out your inner hips and offering a relaxing side bend to bring movement into your ribcage as well.



1. Start sitting in your chair and open your legs wide so that your left knee is hooked over the side of your chair with your left foot flat on the floor. Keep this leg bent at a 90 degree angle.
2. Extend your right leg straight out to the side, keeping your foot planted on the floor.
3. Keep your spine long and lean your torso toward your left leg. Bend your left arm so you can rest your elbow on your thigh.
4. Extend your right arm overhead and reach your fingers toward the left. Gently hug your shoulder blades together so you can rotate your chest up toward the ceiling.
5. Repeat on the other side by bending your right knee over the side of the chair and straightening your left leg. Rest the right elbow on your thigh and reach the left arm overhead.
6. Breathe into this stretch for 10 to 30 seconds and repeat as many times as feels good.

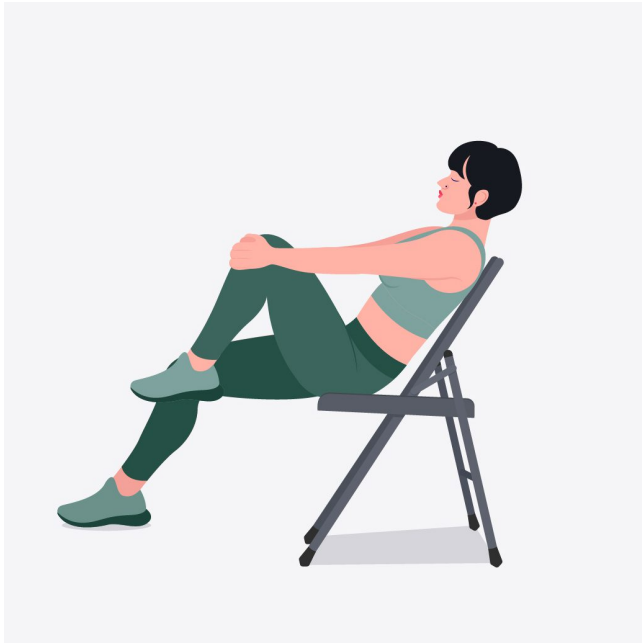
Seated Hip Flexor Stretch

Sitting all day causes our hip flexors—the muscles attaching our core and pelvis to our thighs—to contract and get tight. This desk stretch opens the front line of the hips to counteract the rigidity of being sedentary all day.

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1. Sit toward the front of your chair, place both feet on the floor, and lean back.
2. Keep your right leg extended and hug your left leg into your chest by wrapping your hands around your knee or shin.
3. Keep your back as straight as possible. You can extend your right leg even longer or press your toes down into the ground for a deeper stretch across the front hip flexor.
4. Repeat on the other side by stretching out your left leg and pulling your right knee into your chest. Hold each side for 30 to 60 seconds and repeat several times a day.

Legs and Back

Suffer from back pain? You're not alone. [Experts at Georgetown University](#) estimate nearly 16 million Americans struggle with chronic back pain that makes doing daily tasks—including going to work—incredibly difficult. Even if you just experience mild stiffness in your low back at the end of a long day, take a few minutes to incorporate these easy desk yoga poses into your routine.

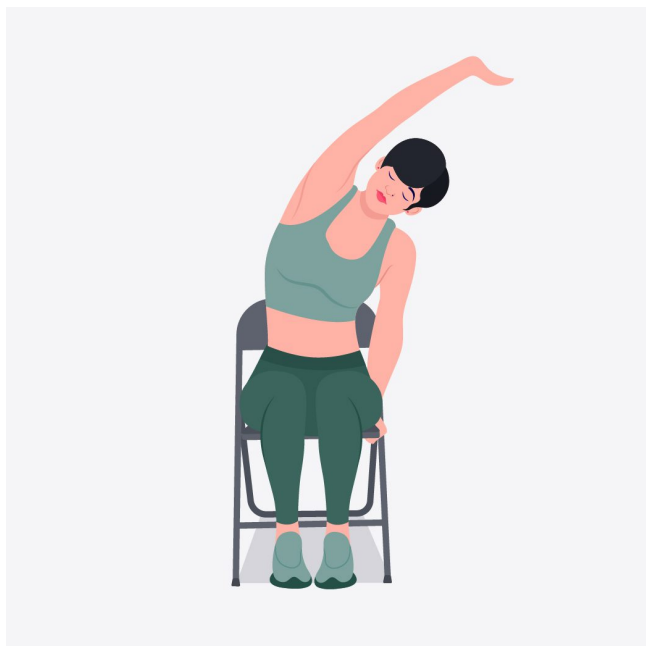
Seated Side Stretch

This simple posture targets the mobility of the spine and opens up the low back. The side body receives a nice stretch, too!

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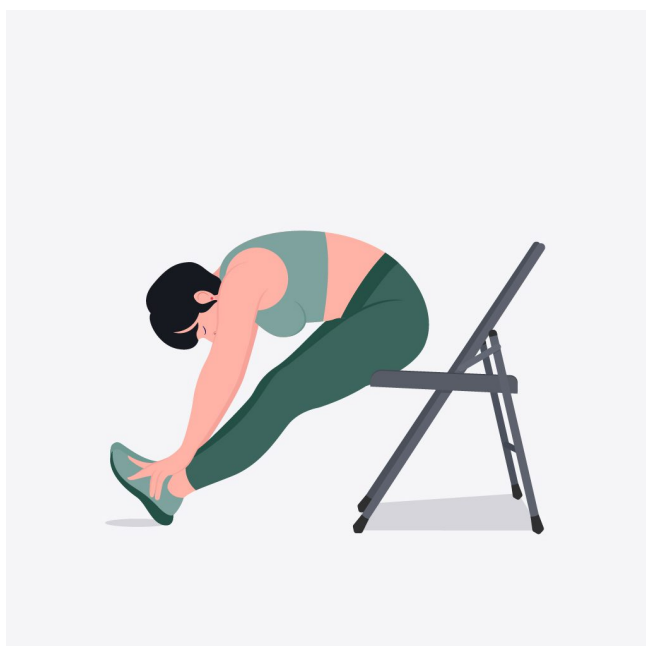
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1. Place your feet on the floor and sit with your spine straight and tall.
2. Reach down with your left hand to grab the seat of your chair. Sweep your right hand overhead and lean to the left, breathing into your right rib cage.
3. Gently press your chest toward the ceiling so your upper body doesn't collapse forward.
4. Repeat on the other side by grabbing the chair with your right hand and sweeping the left arm overhead and to the side.
5. Try a few rounds of flowing fluidly from side-to-side at the pace of your inhales and exhales.

Seated Toe Touch

Use this desk stretch to work out any kinks in your spine and to stretch your hamstrings, glutes, and low back.



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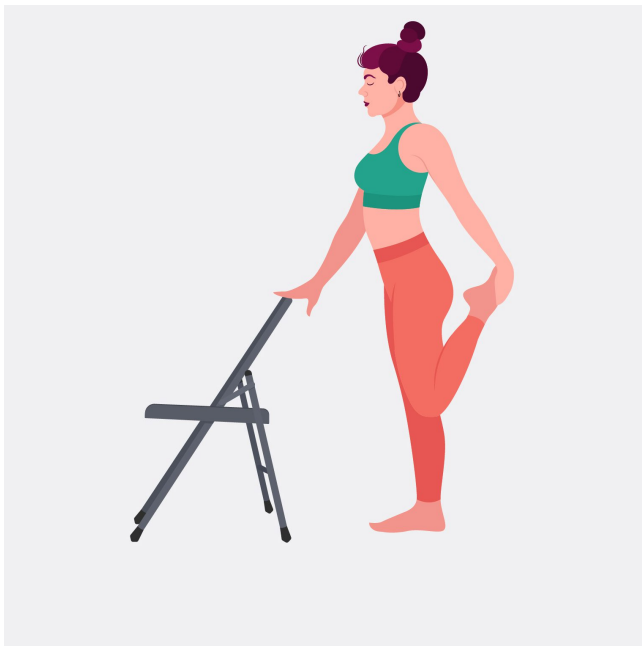
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1. Sit toward the front of your chair and extend both legs out straight with toes flexed back toward your face. If this doesn't feel good, you can keep your knees bent with feet flat on the floor.
2. Hinge forward at your hips and allow your torso to fold over your legs as you reach your hands toward your feet. Reach as far as you can and then let your hands rest on your legs or the floor.
3. Allow your neck to release so your head rounds forward. Hold this stretch for 30 to 60 seconds.

Standing Quad Stretch

Sitting for long periods of time causes your quad muscles to contract, so this desk stretch helps alleviate tension that builds up in the front of your legs.



1. Stand behind your chair with feet hip-distance apart and place your hands on the top of the backrest.
2. Bend your left knee so your heel moves up toward your glute. Reach down with your left hand to grab hold of your foot while keeping your right hand pressed into the chair.
3. Continue to stand tall and engage your core so that your torso doesn't round forward. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.
4. Repeat on the other side by bending your right knee back and reaching down to hold your foot with your right hand.

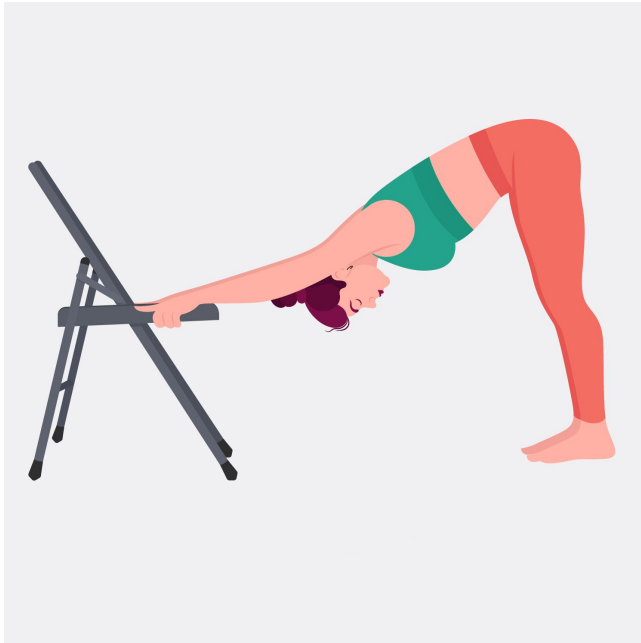
Supported Downward Dog

This desk yoga pose is great for elongating the spine, opening up the low back, and bringing blood flow into the back of the legs.

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1. Stand behind your chair and place your hands on the top of the backrest. If that feels unstable, you can stand at the front of your chair and grip the sides of the seat with both hands.
2. Begin to take small steps backwards so your torso can drop down between the chair and your legs. Walk as far backward as feels comfortable—your torso may be parallel to the floor or sloping down at a diagonal. Keep your spine long and straight.
3. Allow your head and neck to release between your arms. Hold this stretch for 15 to 45 seconds and repeat a few times depending on how tight your back feels.

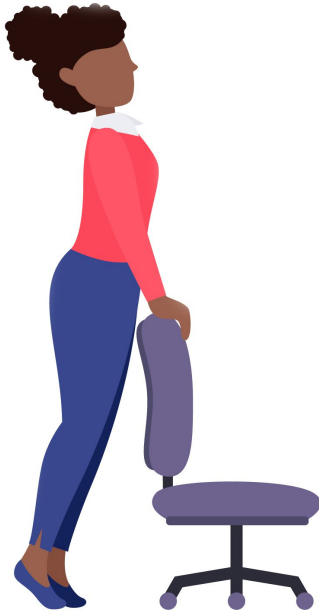
Standing Calf Raise

Repeat this exercise several times in a row to engage the muscles in your calves, hamstrings, and ankles after they've been lying dormant at your desk job.

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1. Stand behind your chair with feet hip-distance apart and place your hands on the top of the backrest.
2. Rise up onto your toes so your heels lift off the floor. Lower back down.
3. Try 10 to 30 reps and repeat three or four times throughout the day.

Standing Kick Back

This desk stretch engages your glutes and hamstrings while gently releasing the hip flexors and strengthening the low back.



1. Stand behind your chair with feet hip-distance apart and place your hands on the top of the backrest or clasped around the sides.

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2. Shift your weight onto your left leg and kick your right leg behind you, keeping your foot flexed. Move your leg back and lean forward slightly, then place your foot back down on the ground underneath your hips as you straighten back up to standing.
3. Repeat on the other side by standing on your right leg and kicking the left leg behind you.
4. Try 10 kick-backs on each leg and repeat this exercise two or three times a day.

This article was originally published on January 18, 2022, and has been updated.