



Simple Stretches for Writers



by Kate Hanley

As writers, the computer may save us time, but that benefit comes at a high physical cost. Repetitive stress injuries, sore neck and shoulder muscles, lower back pain, and chronically tight hips are all natural results of spending eight hours a day hunched over a keyboard. Multiply those eight hours a day over weeks, months, and years, and the physical toll our sedentary profession can take on our bodies—if we don't take any steps to remedy it, that is—is considerable. Luckily, it is possible to ward off the aches, pains and injury associated with heavy computer use.

“The most important thing computer users can do to stay feeling good is to take regular stretching breaks,” says Sandy Blaine, Bay Area yoga teacher and author of *Yoga for Computer Users: Healthy Necks, Shoulders, Wrists, and Hands in the Postmodern Age* (to be released from Rodmell Press in May, 2008). “For every position you hold for any length of time, you have to regularly perform a counter-move, or your neuromuscular patterns start to set in in a negative way.”

I spoke to Blaine to get her guidance on how we can all stay supple and relaxed as we hammer away at our deadlines. Here are her suggestions for elemental moves everyone—no matter your age, fitness level or workload—can do. Just remember that in order to be truly effective, you should incorporate them into your daily work routine. “To really make a noticeable difference in how you feel, the more stretching, the better,” Blaine says.

Neck Stretch

Counteracts: Jutting chin and shortened neck muscles

How to do it: Sit up tall and let your spine rest on the back of your chair. Drop your right ear toward your right shoulder and hold for thirty seconds to one minute. Repeat to the left side, then drop your chin toward your chest. In each position, allow gravity and the weight of your head to gradually encourage your neck muscles to lengthen.

Keep in mind: “Let your sensation level be your guide on how far to lower your head and how long to hold it,” Blaine advises. “Because the neck is delicate and has an extremely important job, you don't want to overdo it.”

Wrist Rolls

Counteracts: Stagnation and fragility in the wrist joint

How to do it: Sit up tall in your chair and clasp your hands together to form one big fist. Bend your elbows so your hands are at chest height, then begin rolling your wrists in a simple figure-eight shape. As you take your wrists through their entire range of motion, you're providing a great counter to all the typing you've been doing

Keep in mind: For added benefit, reverse the direction your wrists are moving for several rotations. “Because the move isn't something you normally encounter in your everyday life, it will help create new pathways in your brain,” Blaine says.

The most important thing computer users can do to stay feeling good is to take regular stretching breaks.

Chest Opener

Counteracts: Rounded shoulders and sunken chest

How to do it: Sit up straight on the edge of your chair and

reach your arms behind your back to lay one forearm on top of the other and clasp opposite elbows.

Keep in mind: This move can also help you avoid the afternoon slump. “Because this position opens the lungs and deepens the breath, it's also subtly energizing,” Blaine says.

Seated Forward Bend

Counteracts: Painfully tight hips

How to do it: Sitting at the edge of chair, plant your feet on the ground wider than your hips. Bend forward at your hips and try to bring your rib cage down between your legs. Take several deep breaths here.

Keep in mind: To come up without straining your back, bring your hands to your thighs and use your arms to push yourself back up to sitting. Let your head come up last. [ASJA](#)

ASJA member **Kate Hanley** specializes in writing about wellness. Visit her at msmindbody.com.



Count me in as a VERY happy member. I just got my first book deal—a life-long dream—thanks to Freelance Writer Search! If not for the generosity of a fellow member, it never would have happened.

—Chrystle Fiedler