

5 Ways To Fight Aches And Pains At Work: Standing

Do you stand or walk around all day at work? These stretches and exercises can be practiced regularly to mitigate the common musculoskeletal issues most workers will encounter:

1. Standing Back Extension

- Place your hands on the small of your back.
- As you exhale gently bring your gaze up to the ceiling or sky.
- Press your hips forward with your hands and arch your back (opposite of a hunched over position).
- Move with your breathing (exhale extend/inhale back to standing straight) for 5-10 breaths.

Standing for extended periods of time can have serious impact on our lower backs (among other body parts), especially the anterior portions of the spinal disks between each vertebra. Poor posture can also put increased and prolonged strain on posterior back muscles. By regularly doing this simple back extension throughout the day, we give tired posterior back muscles a chance to relax and alleviate some disc compression that balances the usual asymmetrical loading that poor posture imposes.

2. Standing Hamstring Stretch

- Find a raised surface such as the seat of a chair and place one heel on the raised surface while semi balancing on the other firmly planted foot. You can use an aid such as a handrail or tabletop to maintain your balance.
- Keeping both legs straight, gently lean forward, over top of the leg resting on the raised surface.
- Make sure to hinge at the hips to perform this “forward lean” in order to maintain proper posture to protect the low back as well as to focus the stretch into the hamstrings.
- You should feel a stretch in the posterior thigh of the leg with the heel that is resting on the raised surface.
- Hold for 5-10 deep breaths.

Walking and standing do not use the full ranges of motion of our legs. Our leg muscles slowly tighten over time due to the minimal muscle activity necessary to maintain posture combined with the relatively small muscle contractions associated with walking. The hamstrings are a muscle group that suffers from these mini contractions and when they are extremely tight can have painful effects on our low backs as well as our feet.

3. Standing Quad Stretch

This stretch has similar implications as the Hamstring stretch described above, but it focuses on the anterior portion of our lower limbs.

- Using something for support/balance (railing, wall, etc.), reach down with your other hand and grab onto the front of your foot.
- Once you have a firm grip on your ankle pull your foot/leg behind you so that your heel comes closer to your buttocks.
- Try to keep your hips square and pressed forward to increase the stretch in front of the thigh.
- Hold for 5-10 deep breaths.

The quads and hip flexors can get very tight from continuous walking and standing. Tight anterior lower limb muscles can pull our pelvises into an Anterior Pelvic Tilt, which can contribute to low back pain so keeping them relatively loose is important. Tight quads can also have negative effect on our knees, which can cause pain.

4. Lunges

This exercise serves multiple ends, from range of motion, to strength building, to proprioception and balance.

Take a giant step forward

- Keeping your torso upright and square, bend your knees so your center of gravity sinks towards the ground.
- Make sure your front knee is directly over top of your front ankle or a little behind it.
Note: DO NOT allow your front knee to be more forward than your front ankle. This can put your knee in a vulnerable position.
- In a strong controlled movement straighten both legs and come back into a standing position.
- Repeat movement with opposite leg.
- Do 20 times total (10 per leg).

Walking and standing do not allow us to utilize the full range of motion of our lower limbs. This can cause tightening of several muscle groups. Lunges are a quick way to utilize our lower limb range of motion and open our hips. They also activate our muscles in a more vigorous way than walking or standing, promoting increased blood flow and strength building.

5. Doorway Chest (Pectorals) Stretch

So far all of our stretches and exercises have been tailored towards the lower body and back but it is very common for our upper bodies posture to fatigue over time from walking and standing. To combat the common Kyphosis (hunchback) posture caused by tight pecs and weak upper backs we can practice the Doorway Chest stretch:

- Find a doorway that you can rest your elbows on either side of the frame.
- Rest elbows and forearms on either side of the door frame.
- Keeping chest and head upright, take a step through the doorway.
- Your arms resting on the frame will resist against your weight stretching your chest.
- Hold for 5-10 deep breaths.

Try and make one or more of these stretches and exercises a regular habit at work. Stop to do at least one of them every 30-60 minutes during the day. This way we can potentially slow the tightening effects of walking and standing that can result in pain!

