

# Back, Neck and Shoulders: Under Pressure

## Quick Massage Pick-Me-Ups while Sitting at a Desk

### By Dawn Groves

When you sit at a desk, hunched over papers or a computer, your body tends to form a C shape. This slumped posture creates pressure on your back, neck and shoulders and can cause pinched muscles, fatigue and, if you've been reading a lot, eye strain. The following pick-me-ups will help break this tension cycle. They don't need to be performed in any particular order. However, if you do only one technique, be sure to repeat it to get the best results. In some cases, you do not need to actually massage the muscle, because the movement itself creates the massage effect. You'll get the maximum benefit from doing two or three techniques.

#### Preparation

1. Loosen your collar.
2. If possible, remove confining or thick garments such as jackets and sweaters.
3. Center your attention before beginning.

#### Shrugging the Shoulders

When you shrug your shoulders, you are exercising muscles that tend to get pulled forward and hardened by tension. This tension buildup commonly occurs when you sit with your weight resting on your tailbone instead of forward over your hips. Shrugging breaks up the tension and provides a mild form of exercise that increases blood flow and restores mobility. The more you support the mobility of your shoulders, the less likely you'll be to harbor tension there.

1. Slowly lift your right shoulder straight up to your ear.
2. Slowly return your right shoulder to a neutral position.
3. Repeat the lift/release movement with the left shoulder.
4. Repeat the lift/release movement with both shoulders together.

#### Hints:

- Keep your shoulder muscles soft as you do this. Don't force the movement.
- Don't tilt your head toward your shoulder. Bring your shoulder up to your ear.
- Keep the opposite shoulder in a neutral or slightly dropped position and avoid hunching it as you lift the shrugging shoulder.

## Squeezing the Neck

It's easy for your neck to become tense, especially when you are seated at a desk. When the neck muscles tense up, your neck often loses its mobility. A neck massage helps to restore muscle flexibility and release built-up tension.

1. Place your right hand on the right side of your neck and position your fingertips just to the right of your neck bones.
2. Keeping your fingertips together, massage the neck muscle using a gentle, circular motion. Without straining, move your hand up and down the neck muscle. Keep your neck in a neutral position as you massage.
3. Repeat the procedure using your left hand on the left side of your neck.
4. Repeat the procedure again using both hands and massage both sides of the neck at the same time.

### Hints:

- Don't press your neck so hard that you feel compelled to counteract the pressure in order to keep your neck from being pushed out of a neutral, upright position.
- Watch out for the tendency to hunch your shoulders, especially as you increase the pressure.
- Don't let your head fall backward into your hand or forward into an extreme bend. Keep it level and in a neutral position.

## Pressing the Temples

It's almost instinctive to rub your temples and forehead when you are tired or stressed. Exerting pressure on the temples does help relieve headaches and jaw pain, and often refreshes the facial muscles.

1. Place the index, middle and ring fingers of each hand against the corresponding temple on either side of your head.
2. Close your eyes, press gently and slowly move your fingers in small circles for about 15 seconds.
3. Rest for 15 seconds and then repeat, with the fingers moving in the opposite direction.

### Hints:

- Rest your elbows on the desk as you massage.
- Don't press too hard, otherwise you might irritate the delicate skin over the temples. If you want to use the pressure technique, keep your fingers still and slowly increase the static pressure.

- Move your fingers very slowly. The slower the movement, the more relaxing the massage.
- Using the same circular movement, massage up your temples and across your forehead.

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