Stretch to Ease Stress

Stress doesn't only wreak havoc on your mind. Too much stress can cause aches and pains in your head, neck, shoulders, and back. Daily stretching can reduce muscle tension, increase blood flow, and improve range of motion and coordination.

SAMPLE STRETCHES

Upper body stretch: Standing or seated, raise your arms above your head and interlace your fingers. With your palms facing upward, push slightly back and up. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Repeat three times.

Sitting hamstring stretch: Sit on the floor. Stretch your left leg out directly in front of you with your toes pointed up. Place your right foot against your left thigh. Slowly bend forward to reach toward or grasp the tips of your left toes. Bend from the hip. Hold for a count of 10. Repeat three times. Do the same exercise, switching leg positions.

STRETCHING SAFETY

1. **Warm up your muscles.** This makes them more flexible and lowers the chance for injury. For example, walk for a few minutes while gently swinging your arms.

2. **Stretch-hold-release.** Hold each stretch for at least 10 to 30 seconds. Repeat each stretch at least three times.

3. **Gain without pain.** Use slow and steady motions to the point of mild discomfort. If you feel pain, you went too far. Stretching should not pinch, pull, or snap anything. Bend your joints slightly when you stretch.

4. **Do not bounce when you stretch.** This can tighten or injure muscles.

ACTION STEP

Take 15 minutes, daily, to stretch all major muscle groups (neck, shoulders, arms, abs, lower back, butt, and legs).