

Stretching the Stress Triangle

Experts tell us that the first group of muscles to receive increased tension when the body is under the stress response is the neck and shoulders. This area has been nicknamed the “stress triangle.” Regular stretching of this muscle zone can prevent excess wear and tear on this particular area of the body. Hold each stretch below for 15 to 30 seconds for maximum benefit.

1. **Shoulder Shrug** – Lift the shoulders as if pretending to touch the ears; hold; release; repeat.
2. **Eardrop** – With shoulders in a relaxed position, drop the right ear to the right shoulder; hold; release slowly, returning to an erect position. Repeat on the left side.
3. **Rubberneck** – With shoulders square facing front, cast a glance over the right shoulder as far as is comfortable; hold; release and return to face front. Repeat on the left side.
4. **Double Chin** – Tuck chin to chest making a double chin of sorts; hold; release. For an added stretch, position palms of hands flat against back of head and resist hands while in double chin position.

A Word on Massage Therapy

Systematic Stress Management promotes responsibility and self-care in learning how to become a better stress manager. Putting one's tense muscles in the hands of an expert massage therapist qualifies as self-care. While another person may be helping you get the job done, your responsibility will lie in locating a qualified massage therapist.

Currently in most states, massage therapists require certification and belong to national and state organizations. A massage therapist is not to be confused with a masseuse. Massage therapists do specialize in a variety of techniques and styles. Make sure you ask questions and communicate with the massage therapist so as to achieve your desired benefit for the time and money you spend.