

7 Undulations to Relieve Office Tension



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Computers are amazing. The digital dynamos give us access to valuable information, organize it, connect us in new ways, and save us from re-typing something a dozen times. Computers can also give us poor posture, back pain, and arm trouble.

However, there's a way to get the benefits of the information age without a pain in the neck.

Even with an ergonomically designed workstation, comfortable chair, and good posture, working at a computer is likely to result in strain, because it requires the body to alternate between repetitive motion and stillness, and that creates stiffness and strain. The answer is to **intersperse variety of motion throughout the day using a technique called undulation.**

Fortunately, the body is forgiving. You can counteract the effects of eight hours a day at a desk with just 15 minutes of undulation. Of course, you'll also need aerobic exercise and strength training to stay healthy in other ways.

This book includes **seven exercises** that each take just a couple of minutes. They **can be done at your desk** and are easily integrated into your day.

The contents of this book are not meant to substitute for medical diagnosis, treatment, or care of any kind. I encourage you to consult with a qualified healthcare professional to determine your individual needs.

What is Undulation?

Undulation is a fluid movement through the body. On one hand, it is very easy. It's a movement that came naturally when we were children; think of the way babies wiggle when they're happy.

As we get older we get stiffer, because we stop these natural, fluid movements.

You don't have to become a belly dancer or a baby to relieve your stiffness though. The strategies in this book are easy to learn and will start to restore your youthful body. If you want to know more, you can find a wide variety (52 exercises plus variations) in *Relieve Stiffness and Feel Young Again with*

Undulation or the 4 CD version, *Undulation Exercises*. You can also watch undulation videos at www.undulationexercise.com.

After just a few minutes of undulation, you will feel better and less stiff. It's a quick method to rejuvenate.

How to Use the Exercises

On an ideal day, you will be so conscious of your body that you'll take a break and move as soon as you feel any discomfort. I never had one of those days when I worked in an office. If you're like me, you get engrossed in projects and slowly your consciousness realizes that something isn't right. What is it? Oh yes, the start of a headache, tingling in the arms, or neck pain.

That's a perfect signal to **take a short break and undulate**. As you learn to intersperse fluid movements, they will come more naturally without preplanning and you'll notice yourself preventing stiffness and pain rather than managing it.

Speaking of prevention, if your computer has a timer you can set it to remind you to take a break every hour or choose an activity, like dialing the phone, waiting for a web page to load, or starting a new document, to trigger an exercise.

It's tempting to do the exercises when you are already taking a break, but it's more effective to **interrupt the stillness and repetitive motion of work** for a minute. Even spending just **one minute on an undulation exercise will make a difference**, and you can do it while waiting for a phone call, the computer to shut down, or a fax to send.

Important Information

First, a warning. Avoid movements that cause pain or make your pain worse. If a movement causes your neck, shoulder or back to hurt, move differently: smaller, slower, or in a different direction. Don't think that the pain is good for you. It's not.

These exercises—although they are easy and not strenuous—will use many muscles that have been inactive in most people. It's tempting to think that one minute of exercise is good, so five minutes is better, and fifteen minutes of undulation is the goal. That's not necessarily true. You can be very sore the day after undulation if you've done too much.

Start with one minute on each exercise and then, if you want, add no more than one minute at a time. Of course, you probably are too busy at work to take a break for fifteen minutes at a stretch, but you want to ease into undulation, just like you would for any other type of exercise, even when you do them at home.

Cautions

If you have osteoporosis, a currently diagnosed bulging disc, spondylosis, spondylolisthesis, or spinal stenosis, please review the exercises in this book with your doctor or physical therapist before you begin. People with these conditions must be very careful with flexion and/or extension movements. Moving very slowly and in small increments can sometimes be tolerated, but I encourage you to get your personal health care provider's advice on this subject.

Encouragement

Anyone, regardless of age, gender, or physical condition, can undulate—and it will help anyone feel more flexible and relaxed. However, many people are surprised by how stiff they actually are when they begin this program. Don't be tempted to stick your head in the proverbial sand though. Give it a try; you'll notice a difference in just a few minutes and the results will give you a tool that will **nourish your spine, arms, and hands** for the rest of your life.

These exercises were designed for a work environment, so they can be done while seated. (You can do many while standing, too.) One of the best things you can do if you sit for much of the day is to pay attention to your posture, and all the undulation exercises will be more effective if you do them when in good alignment.

Good Posture

Most people think that good sitting posture requires pulling the shoulders up and back. However, that only creates strain in the neck and shoulders. Try it this way instead.

Sit a bit forward on your chair so that you **feel both feet firmly on the ground**. You also want both **sit bones resting evenly** on the seat. (See below. The point of the arrow is at the right sit bone.) If you don't know where your sit bones are, put your hands between your seat and the chair, and feel for the knobby bones. Do not lean back on the sit bones, but sit tall on top as they point straight down.



From a firm base of support, you can **relax your shoulders and arms**. If you gently press your feet into the floor and your pelvis is in the right position, you'll feel a subtle lift all the way through your neck and head. It requires effort from your legs, because sitting in good alignment strengthens your core muscles.

Breathing

It is more relaxing to breathe in and out through your nose. You'll get better results with these exercises if you use **smooth, deep breaths**. The undulations will reinforce this healthy breathing pattern, too.

Undulation #1

Reverse the Slouch



1. Sit evenly on your sit bones. It is important for both feet to be firmly planted on the floor.
2. As you exhale, move your torso so that your sternum dips toward your pelvis and the middle of your back rounds out in back like a slouch.
3. As you inhale, move your chest forward and up so that your back arches as the muscles along the sides of your spine contract.
4. Alternate forward and back a few times with your breath.
5. Now try it by initiating the movement from your lower abdominals and pelvis. Pull your pubic bone up toward your chin. Continue to draw your abdominal muscles in and back so that your chest drops down. Let the movement carry up through your neck so that your chin dips toward your chest.
6. To come back up, start at the base of your spine. Rock your pelvis forward so that your sit bones come back onto the chair surface and your low back returns to its normal curve. Continue the motion flow up from your low back through your middle back, upper back, and through your neck. Straighten your spine until you are sitting tall.
7. Repeat curling in and unfurling, starting both movements from the bottom and working up.

Just one minute of this exercise will counteract time spent in poor posture. Even if the movements are very small, they will be beneficial.

Undulation #2

Flush Stiffness from Your Joints



1. Curl and unfurl the fingers and thumb of the hand that you use most often. Imagine that, like an octopus, you don't have any bones in your hand and you are sensing the environment through your "tentacles."
2. For a minute or so, see how fluid your fingers can become. Flush out the inflexibility from your knuckles.
3. Let the movement creep up your hand to incorporate the wrist.
4. Continue the flow up the arm to include the elbow and then the shoulder.
5. Let the movement from your fingers, wrist, elbow, and shoulder influence your spine for a minute.
6. Put your hand back in your lap and notice the difference in feeling between your two hands and arms. Fluid movement really does release tension.
7. Repeat the sequence with your other hand.
8. Now move both hands and arms. Imagine an octopus swimming in the ocean.
9. Sit with both hands in your lap. Feel softness and lightness in your joints and allow that to settle in.

If your boss or co-worker asks "What *are* you *doing*?" inform her that you are preventing carpal tunnel syndrome. That's the truth. Also, this is a great exercise to teach to anyone who works with their hands or is in the early stages of arthritis.

Undulation #3

Add Flexibility to Your Spine



1. Sit evenly on your sit bones.
2. Move your upper body; sway to the left and the right like tall grass blowing in a breeze. As you lean to the right, the left side of your body will stretch a little, and as you lean to the left the right will stretch. Keep your movements easy and in time with your breath.
3. Sway for a bit and notice which parts of your spine move easily and which are stiff.
4. Stop and start again. Initiate a new movement from one of the inflexible places, perhaps from your neck, hips, or between your shoulder blades. Do several revolutions so the muscles and ligaments can soften; the movement *will* become easier and smoother.
5. As you continue, cast your attention inward to the many different places in your spine. Keep your movements soft and easy.
6. Give different places in your spine the chance to lead. Even if it feels uncoordinated or awkward, you will be loosening your muscles from the inside.

This exercise is good for you whether you are at work or home. You can do it in the car while waiting for the stop light to turn green, on the bus, even while waiting in line at the grocery store.

Undulation #4

Free Your Shoulders



1. Lift your shoulders up toward your ears and hold for a couple of seconds. Then let them drop. Repeat this a few times.
2. Lift your shoulders slightly, release and pull them down toward your hips and hold a couple of seconds. Repeat this several times.
3. Circle your shoulders—up, back, and down—both at the same time, and then alternately.



4. Lean to one side. As you lean, reach your arm out to that same side.
5. Come back to center. Move from your spine first; draw your body toward the opposite side and reach with the other arm. Note that the following steps are easier to do when standing.
6. As you reach to the side, let your elbow and wrist bend, first moving up and then as you reach to the other side, pull down.
7. Reach your arms as far overhead as is comfortable. Let your spine and shoulders roll with the movements.

Be careful of whiplash with your neck. As you get more comfortable with this movement, spread your feet farther apart so that your body can sway further to each side.

Undulation #5

Move Slowly to Wake Up Core Muscles



1. Sit on a chair with both feet firmly on the floor.
2. As you inhale, press your feet down in to the floor and your sit bones down into the chair. Slightly lift your spine and ribs.
3. Exhale—stay tall and twist your spine to the right. Imagine your spine as a barber pole, revolving around the center. Try not to let your sit bones lift, your side collapse, or your ribs shift to either side as you twist.
4. Inhale and unwind the twist. Exhale as you return to the twist.
5. Notice if one part twists more than another (neck, shoulders, etc.). If so, limit the movement in that area to match the rest of your spine.
6. Repeat the sequence, twisting to the left.
7. Now slow it down a little. Twist and untwist so that it takes ten counts to get to the *back* of the twist and another ten counts to return.
8. Slow it down even more, and breathe easily without regard to your direction of movement. Say the alphabet as you twist, starting from neutral at “a” and ending at the back of the twist at “z”. Return at this same, slow pace. Hint: aim for “m” at your halfway point.
9. After twisting both ways several times each, let your spine move in a different direction, especially forward and back.

By moving more slowly, you will recruit many of the smaller, core muscles around your spine. Not only will this give you better movement, it improves your posture. Try walking slower and sitting down slower to work your core.

Undulation #6

Shake Stress from Your Finger Tips

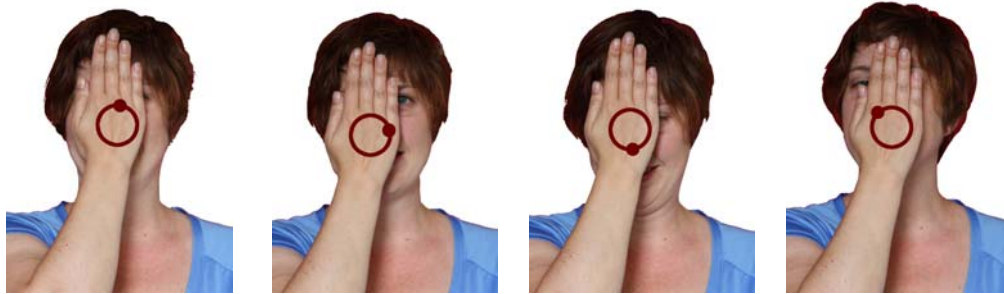


1. Relax your fingers and palm and wiggle your wrist to shake your fingers. Wiggle your elbow to loosen the sticky tension from inside your forearms and imagine it dripping from your finger tips. Do one hand/arm at a time.
2. Try a variation. Shake your hand, wrist and arm down away from your body as though you were flinging water off your fingers.
3. Let your stress fly from your fingertips and surge from your skin with every shake. Don't let the movement become violent; keep it fun.

For variety, inhale steadily then shake your hand in time with an emphasized exhale. Inhale and exhale through your nose.

Undulation #7

Lose the Pain in the Neck



1. Sit with good posture (see page 4) so your spine is aligned, shoulders are relaxed and head is not forward.
2. Put your palm flat against your nose. Draw a circle with your nose on your hand. Make it as smooth and round as you can.
3. Go the other way.
4. Spiral in and out.
5. When you get the hang of it, you don't need your hand against your nose. You can just draw the circles in the air.

Once again a co-worker may ask, “*Now* what are you doing?” It might look funny, but this is a great way to relieve pain at the base of the skull and upper neck. Share this ‘wobble head’ exercise and watch your co-workers’ tension drain away.

You can find other Undulation Exercises that can be done at the office such as Unnoticeable, Feel Your Spine, Hip Hiker, Balance Scale, Tree Tops, Yes-No-Maybe So, Speed Bump, and Waterfall in *Relieve Stiffness and Feel Young Again with Undulation* or the audio version, *Undulation Exercises*.

For more information or to contact the author visit
www.undulationexercise.com.

Exercises at a Glance



Print this page and place it on your desk as a reminder to move through the day.