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Expert Relief for Muscle Tension

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Fitness Tips for Women
from beLister
Nancy Christie



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We've all felt the painful effects of muscle tension. But don't despair: these expert tips will help you avoid the causes and deal with muscle tension when it occurs. Read this article written by [Nancy Christie](#), a professional health and wellness writer. [Nancy](#), a motivational speaker and author is committed to helping women find ways to get out of ruts by developing new habits and thought discipline. Get to know more about [Nancy](#) at our [beTeam](#) page.

Tension in the Upper Body

Andrea Wilson, a physical therapist and certified Pilates Instructor with Methodist Sports Medicine—The Orthopedic Specialists in Indiana, listed some common postures that lead to tension in the neck, back, hips and arms.

- Sitting at a computer, driving or reading with the chin thrust forward and the shoulders rounded stresses the muscles in the back of the neck and shoulders.
- Sleeping curled up with the neck bent forward shortens the muscles at the base of the skull and over-lengthens the muscles that support the front of the neck.
- Holding the phone between the shoulder and the ear or carrying a purse, baby, or backpack always on the same side compress one side of the body downward and put tension on the opposite side.

Wilson recommends doing these exercises daily to help relieve upper body tightness:

- Chin tuck—Bring the chin straight back into the neck, with the ears straight over the shoulder and eyes looking straight ahead. This will correct the over-lengthened muscles in the front of the neck and stretch the muscles at the base of the skull.
- Head tilts—Tilt the head to the right, ear toward the shoulder and hold the stretch for 30 seconds, repeating to the left to stretch the upper trapezius.
- Levator scapula stretch—Take the nose to the armpit by turning the head 45 degrees and then bringing the chin down, holding for 30 seconds. Repeat to the other side.
- Shoulder shrugs, shoulder rolls and shoulder blades squeezes—all three will relieve tension in the upper back and also help reverse slumped shoulder posture.

Tension in the lower body

"If the hamstrings are tight, they are placing more force on the pelvis which can cause rotational abnormalities of the pelvis which will then affect all of the low back muscles," explains Casey E. Gibbons, MEd, orthopaedic physician assistant and athletic trainer at Plancher Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine in Connecticut and New York.

Common posture habits include sitting too long in a slumped position or with legs crossed at the knees, standing in a swayback stance or wearing high heels for hours. All these can lead to tension in the low back muscles, hip flexors and hamstrings, joint stress in the spine and hip, and shortening of the calf muscles.


Try these stretches to relieve the tension:

- Low back—from a seated posture, bend the body forward over the legs, trying to reach the hands to the floor. Hold 10 seconds and repeat 10 times.
- Hips—Stand with one leg behind you in a small lunge (runner's stretch). Hold 30 seconds while pulling up the abdominals so you feel the stretch in the front of the hip and the calf.

Pain relief options include:

- Oral anti-inflammatory medications (such as Advil or ibuprofen)
- Topical anti-inflammatory medications (such as gels or patches)
- Icing the area.

You can also try trigger point massage, acupuncture, physical therapy, and trigger point or epidural injections, said physical therapist Andrew Kirk, also of Plancher Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine.

"[But] more important than any one exercise is practicing postural hygiene. Engage the muscles of your buttocks and abdomen to support your spine. Don't always carry your stuff on one shoulder. Don't slouch in your chair and stand up straight," added Wilson. "Yes, your mother was right about all those things!"  [ShareThis](#)