

## STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Stress in the workplace is as evident today as ever. Stress alone won't kill you however, chronic compound stress could. It's well known that chronic stress, the kind imposed by financial, job, and relationship worries is the primary contributor to acceleration of the aging process. Chronic stress can make you less productive and both literally and figuratively less attractive. Exercise is the number one enemy of stress. A good set of abdominal crunches will have stress heading for the hills if performed on a regular basis. Adding to many people's stress is their attempt to find the time to exercise. So here are some simple exercises you can do while sitting at your desk. They may not eliminate the stress itself but they will reduce its harmful effects.

*Breath!* Stress triggers a physiological fight or flight response, which causes a tightening within the diaphragm and middle back. This leads to short shallow breathing.

- **Exercise:** If stress causes you to slouch, drop your chin and breathe shallow, then perform the opposite movement. Lift your head and chest, sit up straight and take long deep breaths. Do this for 2-3 minutes. The stress won't go away but your damaging physical response will.

Quite frequently, stress manifests itself in the back, shoulders, and neck regions of the body. Most chronic back problems are caused by stress. The muscles tighten up causing trigger points or knots. Those knots must be massaged or strengthened for relief.

- **Exercise:** While at your desk, grasp the base of your chair with either your right or left hand. While keeping your back as straight and upright as possible reach over the top of your head just above the ear with the opposite hand. Gently stretch your neck by pulling your head towards your shoulder. Make sure you keep your shoulders down. If either one comes up you'll minimize the effect of the stretch. Hold the stretch for 15-20 seconds then continue the process on the other side. Repeat 2 times for each side.

Shoulder rolls are also very good for relaxing stressed necks and upper back muscles.

- **Exercise:** Begin by sitting up-right in your chair. Pull your shoulders forward, as if to concave your chest, then immediately bring your shoulders up to your ears in a shrug fashion followed by pulling back, as if to bring out your chest and squeeze your scapula together. The whole movement done in sequence would simply be your shoulders rolling forward then backward. Perform 10 forward and 10 back for a total of 2 to 3 sets.

If stress does indeed cause a fight or flight response you basically have two choices. Either punch out your boss or run like hell. A right hook to your boss's jaw might actually cause more stress for the both of you, opt for running. That's right, while sitting in your chair move your arms, head, and torso as if you were running. Really pump it out, arms moving at 90 miles an hour, swivel chair swaying from side to side, breathing like Michael Johnson in a 200 meter race, for 30-60 seconds. Your body won't know the difference and you'll burn off much of the adrenaline it's been producing. If you're not sure of the technique, check out Jim Carey in Dumb & Dumber. He had it down. If caught in the act you may look like your auditioning for the sequel, but then again laughter is the best stress reliever of all.