

your Self [FITNESS]

GET FIT While You WORK

These moves can help you stay limber during a long day at the office.

If you work in an office, chances are you spend hours every day sitting, which increases joint stiffness and decreases your overall health. Give this workplace workout a whirl to reduce arthritis pain and stiffness. Before you start, adjust your chair to a comfortable height and if it has rollers, brace it against a wall or desk. —BRYAN D. VARGO

SEATED LEG ROW

- Sit upright in a chair, holding chair arms, feet flat on floor.
- Lift feet together with legs straight in front of you and bring knees toward chest.
- Extend legs forward. Repeat crunch without a rest 3 to 5 times.



DESK PUSH-UP

- Stand facing your desk with feet hip-width apart 3 to 4 feet from your desk.
- Place your hands on the edge of your desk shoulder-width apart.
- Slowly lower torso toward desk until elbows are slightly less than 90 degrees. Push up, straightening elbows. Repeat 5 to 8 times.



HAMSTRING CHAIR WALK

- On a wheeled chair or stool, sit toward the edge of the seat and hold the seat with both hands.
- Digging in with your heels, "walk" to pull yourself 6 to 10 steps across a hard surfaced floor, or a carpeted floor for an added challenge.



SEATED SCISSORS KICKS

- Sit upright in a chair with hands on chair arms, feet flat on floor.
- Lift feet forward, extending legs in front of you. Raise one leg up while lowering the other, like scissors.
- Continue for 5 to 8 kicks.

TRICEPS CHAIR PUSH

- Sit upright in an armchair with feet flat on floor, hands gripping the middle of the chair's arms.
- Push down to lift buttocks off chair until your arms are straight.
- Slowly lower back to a seated position. Repeat 5 to 8 times.

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how to destress

GET MOVING

As a psychologist in private practice in Manhattan,

Phyllis Zilkha, PhD, works with many professionals stressed out by pressure-cooker jobs. One piece of her advice is always the same: "I'm a tremendous believer in exercise," says Zilkha. "We can't just talk stress away. Anxiety and stress are like an energy that's free-floating in your body. Exercise releases that tension and energy."

• How it works: The body releases "feel-good" hormones, such as endorphins (which seem to reduce the brain's perception of pain) during physical activity, though some scientists believe that exercise works its magic by making the body more efficient at coping with stress. A number of studies have found that a regular routine of huffing and puffing can dial down stress. For instance, a paper published earlier this year in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology* found that college students who exercised regularly had significantly lower levels of stress (as measured by their heart rate and comments made in daily diaries) during final exams than students who didn't work out.

• Do it: When you start to feel overburdened, do whatever physical activity gives you the most joy – whether it's biking or playing tag with the kids or grandkids. If nothing else, go for a walk outside, preferably surrounded by nature; studies show nature provides added stress relief.

CALM THE CATASTROPHE

Quieting the incessant chatter in your mind can ease stress and make arthritis symptoms more manageable. In a 2015 study published in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, professor of psychology Mary Davis, PhD, and several colleagues at Arizona State University showed that RA patients who practiced meditation for just 10 or 20 minutes a day significantly reduced joint pain and tenderness,

while improving their mood. Davis explains, patients taught to meditate were able to curb the tendency to catastrophize, or perceive a problem as worse than it really is – a sure recipe for stress.

QUICK STRESS BUSTERS

Try progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). With PMR you consciously tighten one muscle group (such as your right hand, by making a fist) for a short period, then release that tension and move on to another muscle group. It not only calms the mind, but a 2010 study published in *Seminars in Arthritis and Rheumatism* found that RA patients also reported less pain after completing eight hour-long PMR sessions.

Stop checking devices every two minutes. Phones and tablets too often expose us to scary news alerts and emails from angry bosses. If you simply can't resist your devices, pick up your phone and call a friend – social support is essential for managing stress.

Choose sugar-free drinks. A 2015 study of lab rats published in *Frontiers in Molecular Neuroscience* found that consuming lots of the sweet stuff causes brain changes similar to those brought on by chronic stress.

Take a hot bath or shower before bed. Stepping out of the steamy water before bed causes body temperature to drop, which is necessary for deep, restorative sleep.

so terrible if you're a few minutes late for your dinner reservation? Often, you'll discover that your worries are irrational or exaggerated. Replace negative thoughts with more positive ones, like "we'll get there eventually and have a great meal."

• How it works: We become alarmed by acute pain, such as from a severe cut, and that's a good thing, because our fear drives us to seek immediate treatment and vow to be more careful in the future, says Davis. However, the same alarms can get triggered by chronic pain, even though everyday aches and soreness are not a signal that you're in imminent danger. Misinterpreting those pain signals as an emergency "is a problem," says Davis, "because it can take over your life." Ultimately, it can worsen symptoms and disease and make arthritis harder to manage.

• Do it: Try mindfulness meditation – simply paying attention to your breath and gently guiding your attention back if it drifts; it helps people focus less intently on how lousy they might feel. "Mindfulness meditation gives you some space to see and live your life more fully, so that it's not simply about pain," says Davis.

HOLD THAT THOUGHT

Shifting how you think about tense or difficult situations can keep the effects of stress at bay, says Hasset. To teach clients how to pull it off, mental health professionals use a strategy known as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

• How it works: CBT teaches people how to recognize when they're engaging in self-defeating thoughts, then replace them with more upbeat thoughts, which eases stress. A 2015 study in *Arthritis & Rheumatology* found that people with knee OA and insomnia who received CBT slept better, and about one-third said their pain levels dropped, too, by 30 percent on average.

• Do it: Start by assessing the situation. If a traffic jam is making your brain boil, ask yourself why. Will it really be