

## Stretch Out

A few precautions can prevent future pain

Kelli Crosby

You brush your teeth daily because you don't want cavities or gum disease, right? Well, what do you do on a daily basis to prevent tension in your neck? Brushing your teeth offers you preventive dental care, but what if you could learn to be preventive with the rest of your body?

We all have bad daily habits we don't even notice until something starts to hurt. These bad habits are the root cause of many painful conditions. To help prevent pain, however, we can turn these bad habits into good habits that can be worked into our daily routine. Here is some general advice that can apply to almost every part of daily living.

### Sit Up Straight.

Sit in a chair with your hands on your hips. Slouch. Feel how your hips roll back (if you're wearing jeans, you'll be sitting on your pockets). Now sit up straight by moving your pelvis forward and centering your weight over your pelvis and off your buttocks.

### Sleep on Your Back or Side.

Sleeping on your stomach makes you twist your neck and body in order to breathe. This twisted position is terrible for your spine, especially for prolonged periods during sleep. Check your pillow and make sure it has a thickness that will support your neck in a position neutral to the rest of your spine. Try a

*Live for each second without hesitation.*

-Elton John



Even just a few minutes at work can help turn bad habits into good ones.

### Don't Slouch.

Slouching puts strain on your neck and can give you a headache. Your head weighs roughly 10 pounds-about as much as a bowling ball. Your spine is designed to balance that bowling ball when you're in an upright posture. If you slouch, your muscles have to do more work to hold your head up, which makes your muscles tight and angry.

memory-foam contour pillow, especially if you are a side sleeper.

### Bend with a Straight Spine.

Bending over with a curved back puts pressure on your disc material and strains the spine. The pressure created during incorrect bending can cause the

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### Office Hours and Contact

Joan Schult, LMT, 248-343-6182  
Ann Schornak, LMT, 248.909.9039  
Shelley Larke, LMT, 248.933.6192  
Tiffany Geskey, LMT, 248.990.6208  
Kristie Vargo, LMT, 586.335.7323  
BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

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discs to bulge and put pressure on spinal nerves. Your back was not made to lower and raise your body—that's what your buttocks, hips, and knees are for.

Stand with your knees shoulder-width apart and pretend you are going to lift a 50-pound box off the floor. If you are bending your knees and hips and using your legs to lower and raise your body weight, you are lifting correctly. Now, use the same technique to pick your shoes up off the floor. Think about a squatting movement when you need to lean forward, too—such as while washing your face in the sink. Let your hips and knees do the work.

### **Take Regular Stretch Breaks.**

The muscles in your arms and hands get tight when you grip or pull. The muscles in your neck and shoulders get tight when you reach forward or away from your body. Give these muscles a break with a simple stretch.

It only takes 10 seconds to lengthen the tight tissue, which will take pressure off your joints and prevent chronic conditions like tendinitis and bursitis. Watch for opportunities to work in a brief stretch.

### **Undo Yourself.**

Evaluate the position of your body during your daily activities and make sure you "undo" that position during the day. There is no way to teach a stretch for every single activity you do, but if you take the time to reverse the position of the joint and stretch in the opposite direction, you will lengthen tight tissue and reduce repetitive strain on joints.

## **Tips to Save Your Body**

Replacing bad habits with good ones takes time and thought, but the effort is well worth it. Here are some helpful tips to keep you on track.

-- If you keep waking up on your stomach, wear a pair of gym shorts to bed and put a golf ball in each pocket. When you roll onto your stomach, the golf balls will wake you up and you can return to your back or side.

-- When unloading the dishwasher and getting laundry out of the machine, pose

like a tennis player waiting for a serve. The knees are over your toes (but not beyond the toes), buttocks are backward, and shoulders are forward.

-- Don't try to carve out 30 minutes daily for a stretching routine. If you stretch regularly throughout the day, you will be more effective at keeping tissue loose. Remember, it only takes 10 seconds to stretch a muscle—so find those seconds during your day and make the most of them.

-- Think about stretching the same way you think about hydration. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink water; by then you're already dehydrated. If you wait until something hurts before you stretch, you could develop chronic tension that can lead to everything from a headache to tendinitis.

A daily stretching routine will help

prevent future issues and address current ones. Don't wait until it's a problem. Start stretching today and, little by little, your body will thank you.

*Kelli Crosby is the author of How to Think Like a Physical Therapist in Your Everyday Life. She graduated in 1999 from the University of North Florida and completed her specialty certification in orthopedic manipulative therapy in 2006.*



**Stretching for 10 seconds can take pressure off your joints and help relieve pain.**

# Stay Hydrated

Jennie Hastings Stancu

Has your therapist told you about the importance of drinking water?

After all, our bodies are composed of approximately 60 percent water, and all of our bodily functions are sustained by water. Dehydration is one of the most common detriments to our health, and one of the easiest problems to fix. Make staying hydrated simple and seamlessly interwoven throughout your day.

## START EACH DAY OFF RIGHT

Start your morning with a tall, room-temperature glass of water with lemon squeezed into it, before you start taking any tea, coffee, or food. Front-loading hydration is helpful to the body. And be luxurious with your water--for a special treat, add mint, cucumber, or lemon.

## HALF YOUR WEIGHT

It is difficult to know how much water is enough. One rule of thumb is to take half your body weight in pounds, and drink that many ounces of water per day.

So if you weigh 150 pounds, this would equal 75 ounces of water. For many of us, however, this might not be enough. If you are working hard, or you live in a particularly dry climate, you might need to drink even more than this.

## WHAT ABOUT BPA?

You've probably seen the phrase "BPA free" on water bottles, and you may want to gravitate toward these. BPA stands for bisphenol A, which is a chemical found in polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resins.

According to [Mayoclinic.org](http://Mayoclinic.org), some research has shown BPA can seep from a container into foods and beverages, and this is concerning because of possible health effects BPA has on the brain and behavior. Look for non-plastic bottles, or look for the "BPA free" logo.

## OTHER DRINKS

Drinking herbal tea is a good way to stay hydrated. You can also augment your hydration with electrolyte-fortified water or sports drinks. However, be

aware that a lot of these drinks have incredibly high levels of sugar in them. Hydration isn't a healthy habit if you drink a day's worth of sugar in every glass. So check the label before you buy.

Jennie Hastings Stancu is a licensed massage therapist and author.



Stay hydrated to keep your body functioning optimally

# Don't Get Sick!

## Prevention is Key

Leslie Roste

Regardless of whether the threat is a simple cold or the flu, there are several things you can do to protect yourself from unnecessary downtime.

### Proper Hand Washing

This gets top billing because of its true effectiveness in preventing illness. The most important aspects of hand washing are the length of time (at least 30 seconds) and the amount of friction you use, not the water temperature. In fact, warm water is better than hot, as hot water dries the skin, leaving more microscopic openings on its surface. In cases where hand washing is not practical, keep hand sanitizer available. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can also contribute to drying of the skin, so be diligent about moisturizing.

### Immunizations

Have you had all your shots? The most underimmunized group in America is women aged 30-55. Check with your physician to make sure you are up-to-date on everything from influenza to tetanus.

### Fluids and More Fluids

Staying well hydrated clearly benefits our skin, the largest organ of our immune system. The advice to stay adequately hydrated is even more important in the cold, dry months of winter.

### Eat Your Vitamins

A balanced diet, which includes all food groups, gives your immune system the resources it needs when it faces a challenge like the flu.

### Eight Hours of Sleep

Research continues to prove how vital

this is to every part of our well-being. It affects everything from our ability to resist illness to managing weight.

### Hands and Face

It is important to keep your hands away from your face--particularly the eyes, mouth, and nose, which are favorite points of entry for viruses. Start paying attention to how frequently you touch your face. Break the habit, and you could reduce your risk of colds and flu this season by more than 50 percent.

Leslie Roste has degrees in nursing and microbiology and is employed by King Research in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

*Turn your  
wounds into  
wisdom.*

-Oprah

Moonbeam Massage, LLC  
6401 Citation Dr, Suite D  
Clarkston, MI 48346  
Enter BACK of building.

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## Moonbeam Massage LLC

6401 Citation Dr, Suite D  
Clarkston, MI 48346



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