

## Exercises that counteract a day at the computer

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The office might not seem like a hazardous workplace, but over time sitting in front of your computer can weaken muscles leading to chronic back pain, repetitive strain injuries in the shoulders, elbows, wrists and forearms and hand tendinitis.

As a writer, my computer is my livelihood, but at the age of 30, I have developed three of these issues. Unable to give up my computer, I searched for a solution. That's how I came upon Computer Fit, a yoga- and Pilates based program offered through Synergy Sports Medicine & Rehabilitation, located just north of Bloor St. W. and Lansdowne Ave. It uses breathing techniques and exercises to address computer-related injuries.

Dr. Raza Awan liked the rehab potential of yoga and Pilates and worked with instructors to modify movements from fitness exercises to rehabilitation drills, keeping core strength as the basis of the movements to address office-related injuries.

"We see neck pain from computer use particularly with women who returned to work after pregnancy. Their abs and core aren't strong so they're getting neck tension because of poor posture," Dr. Raza Awan says. Similarly, forearm pain can come from the body compensating for weak shoulders.

The pressure of work can also be a factor. "stress gets into your neck and shoulders," he says. During the class, they use breathing techniques to reduce that stress, derived from yoga and Pilates. Strengthening the core and shoulders also helps with prevention. Yoga and Pilates moves can also help stretch out the back, chest, neck and leg muscles.

Proper ergonomics is also important; strength and stretching can't make up for a bad chair or a low computer screen.

After I took a class, under instructor Riki Richter, my back felt stronger and I stood taller. Best of all? My forearms didn't scream while I typed this article.

Five moves that will counteract a day at your desk

### **Posture corrector**

Sitting with your feet planted on the floor, inhale using the diaphragm and lift your breastbone towards the ceiling. Draw the bottom of shoulder blades together and elongate the crown of head to the ceiling.

### **Neck stretch**

Place your hand under one side of your chair, lean your body to the opposite side letting your neck fall, then bend your chin toward your shoulder to feel a pull.

### **Forearm release**

Place a one-inch rubber ball on your desk. With your forearm perpendicular to your torso, roll the ball under your forearm. The rubber ball acts like a foam roller for your forearms to loosen the muscles.

### **Hamstring stretch**

Sitting on the edge of chair, extend one leg in front so the heel is touching the ground, flex the foot and bend forward slightly at the hips, keeping the pelvis stable.

### **Hip opener**

Sitting with your feet planted on the floor, cross one ankle to the opposite knee and bend forward slightly at the hips until you feel the stretch.