

MUSCLE TENSION

Stress can result in painful and tense muscles. This may happen when we misplace effort when using our muscles, a process called dysponesis. For example, we may tense our shoulders while we type. Stress may also lead to constriction of the blood vessels, which results in reduced blood and oxygen flow to muscles. Try some of the following skills to help reduce muscle tension and stress!

Stretching

- Regular stretching can increase blood flow to muscle tissue.
- It also aids in relaxing tense muscles associated with stress.
- Finally, stretching provides immediate relief from muscle tension.



Shoulder Stretch



Neck Stretch



Arm Stretch



Back Stretch

Helpful tip:

Try to hold each stretch for 15-30 seconds. Release the stretch if you feel any pain - stretching should not hurt.

Allow yourself to breathe slowly and freely as you stretch.

Movement Breaks

- Immobility can lead to muscle tension. Consider the follow two ways to relieve your muscle tension.
- Take a micro-break every 20-30 seconds, like rolling your neck or shaking your hands.
- Take a longer break (2-3 minutes) every 20-30 minutes to move your entire body, like stretching or walking around.

Mindfulness

- Mindfulness promotes awareness of muscle tension, which is an important step towards a long-term decrease in muscle tension.
- Mindfulness may reduce stress, which may also significantly reduce muscle tension.

WHY DO WE EXPERIENCE MUSCLE TENSION?

There are many different reasons that muscles could experience pain. Muscle pain could come from unnecessary effort, dysregulated breathing, lack of movement, and muscle spindles. Learn more about each cause of muscle pain and what you can do about it.

Dysponesis

- Dysponesis occurs when you use **more effort in your muscles** than you need to.
- For example, when you chew with more force than necessary.



- In order to reduce dysponesis, notice when you are using too much effort, and adjust your movements accordingly.

Immobility

- Immobility can lead to muscle tension. **Sitting still often** can decrease the amount of blood flowing to your muscles, which can result in an accumulation of lactic acid and tension.
- In order to reduce immobility, take “movement breaks” every few minutes.



Overbreathing

- Overbreathing occurs when you **breathe too quickly** or deeply for carbon dioxide to regulate blood flow to your muscles.



- In order to reduce overbreathing, practice mindful slow and low breathing.

Muscle Spindles

- Muscle spindles may be responsible for muscle pain. Muscle spindles are activated by the automatic part of our nervous systems, and are often created in **response to anxiety, stress, and other emotions.**
- In order to reduce muscle spindles, practice diaphragmatic breathing and mindfulness, or seek professional help.

