

Muscle Stretches

People unconsciously stretch many of their muscles throughout the day, and for good reason; muscles must be stretched in order to relax. Individuals with jaw and neck muscle pain, as well as those with “stress” or “tension” headaches often find significant pain reduction utilizing these stretching exercises along with home self-care strategies. Benefits may not be noticed for a couple of weeks, so don’t become discouraged.

It is best to gently open and close about 10 times prior to stretching the jaw and perform the first few neck exercises with light pressure to warm-up the muscles. At no time should the exercises cause pain. Perform them firmly, but gently, and if pain is felt, decrease the intensity, perform less repetitions and build slowly. Always maintain good posture during the exercises or you may add to the pain. Follow your provider’s recommendations using this form as a guide.

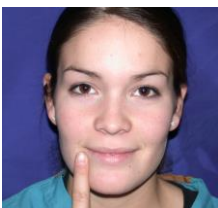
1. Jaw Stretches

Place 1 knuckle, 2 fingertips or 2 knuckles between the teeth as shown. Use the maximum opening without pain, but never use more than 2 knuckles width opening. The lower teeth should not press against the fingers; yet keep the jaw gently stretched. Remember good posture; do not lean forward when the fingers are between the teeth. Hold for 10-20 seconds with the fingers inserted, remove the fingers and relax for 10-20 seconds, then repeat. Do this 6 times each session and do 6 sessions per day.



2. Stabilization Exercises

Place 1 finger on the side of the chin as shown with VERY light relaxed pressure (the tendency is to use more pressure than necessary). Gently move the jaw against the finger and hold for 10-20 seconds, relax for 10-20 seconds and repeat. The fingers and the jaw should not move against the light steady isometric pressure. Perform 1 session for the right, left, top, and bottom as shown. Do each 6 times and 6 sessions per day.



3. Jaw Rotation

This is an exercise to LIGHTLY pump the jaw up and down in order to improve joint lubrication, blood flow and function. Place the tip of the tongue gently on the palate and open and close slowly. When closing, do not touch the teeth together. Avoid excessive opening. Open no more than the width of the tip of the little finger. Do this for 10-20 seconds, relax, and repeat for 6 times each session and do 6 sessions per day.



4. Chin Tuck

Bring the head straight back as if on a horizontal plane, hold for 10-20 seconds, relax for 10-20 seconds and repeat. Do this 6 times each session and do 6 sessions per day. You will feel pressure at the base of the skull/top of the neck. Do not overdo the exercise or you will be sore the following day.



5. Neck Flexion

Keeping the back and shoulders straight, bend the head forward as if to bring the nose to the chest. Place a hand to the back of the head and apply gentle, but firm pressure. Hold steady in this position for 10-20 seconds, relax for 10-20 seconds and repeat. Do this 6 times each session and do 6 sessions per day.



6. Lateral Neck Stretches

Keeping the back and shoulders straight, bring the head to the side as if touching the ear to the shoulder. Place the hand of the same side to which you are stretching over the head and hold firmly. Do not raise the shoulder toward the ear during the stretch. Hold steady for 10-20 seconds, relax 10-20 seconds and repeat. Perform this for the left and right. Do this 6 times each session and do 6 sessions per day.



7. Diagonal Flexion

Keeping the back and shoulders straight, turn the head downward and to the right to look directly at the armpit. When turned to the right place the right hand up and over the head and pull the head and face firmly towards the armpit. Hold steady for 10-20 seconds, relax 10-20 seconds and repeat. Perform this to the right and left. Do this 6 times each session and do 6 sessions per day.



8. Mid/Upper Back Stretch

Standing with good posture facing a corner, place one hand on each wall as shown. The hands should be 1 ½ -2 shoulders width apart. Gently and slowly lean forward to the corner keeping the hands in place and the elbows pointed back. Hold for 10-20 seconds, relax 10-20 seconds and repeat.

