"How can I get more stretching exercises into my routine?"

Below are some easy chair stretches from yoga you can do just about anywhere.

Stretching is one third of fitness. It's something we can all do. It increases flexibility and blood flow, and provides nourishment and oxygen to your muscles and joints.

1. **Forward bend –** ***eases tension in upper back and neck.***

   Breathe in and breathe out as you bend forward. Let your head and arms hang over your knees. Relax into the position and hold for five, slow deep breaths. Breathe in as you slowly come back up to a seated position.

2. **Spinal twist –** ***increases circulation and flexibility in the spine.***

   Sit facing forward and place your left hand on the outside of your right knee. Place your right arm over the back of the chair. Breathe in and breathe out as you twist to the right. Turn your head as well. Push against your right knee. Breathe normally and hold that position. Release slowly and come back to facing forward and repeat on the opposite side.

3. **Side stretch –** ***increases flexibility of the spinal column, improves respiration and reduces waistline.***

   Sit facing forward with feet slightly apart, breathe in, and raise your arms out to the sides. Breathe out and bend to the left, reaching toward the floor with your left hand and toward the ceiling with your right hand. Hold for five, slow deep breaths. Breathe in and come back to your starting position. Repeat with your right side.

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4. **Knee squeeze – *relaxes lower back, improves digestion and respiration.***

   Breathe in and breathe out. Put both hands around the front of your left knee and pull it to your chest while you exhale. Lower your head to your knee. Hold for five, slow deep breaths and release slowly while breathing out. Repeat on your right side.

5. **Leg lifts – *strengthens legs and lower back, and improves circulation to your legs and feet.***

   Sit and hold each side of the chair for balance. Breathe in and breathe out as you lift your straightened left leg and flex your foot. Hold for five, slow deep breaths, then slowly breathe out while lowering your leg. Repeat the same with your right leg.

6. **Sun pose – *improves circulation to your head, massages internal organs, and limbers your spine and hips.***

   Sit back in the chair with legs apart and arms by your side. Breathe out completely then breathe in and with a sweeping motion bring your arms up over your head. Look up and stretch. Breathe out while bending forward between your legs and, if you can, put your palms on the floor. Slowly breathe in while raising back up with arms over head again, then lower your arms to the side.

Important: Please remember, never push your body to a point that causes pain. You will still get the benefit of the postures even if you are not very flexible. The best part is, if you do yoga on a regular basis, your flexibility and strength will increase. Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any exercise practice, especially if you have any health issues.

Doing these yoga stretches once a day, or even three times a week, will be of benefit to your body, mind and spirit.

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