



U3AM at Home

POSTURE, STRETCHING AND BALANCE IN LOCKDOWN

The recent and coming weeks provide a marvellous opportunity for us to indulge in some favourite or new activities.

At our home we have had no excuses to not clean out cupboards/drawers and tackle some painting jobs. However, we have time also for reading larger chunks of books at one session, extra walks and exercise, baking bread, researching on computer not to mention a jig saw. As I linger for longer periods in a chair or over a kitchen bench top, I try to be mindful of the need to regularly stretch out muscles, and check posture. If you find you are engaged in the same position for longer than intended, then perhaps try some of my favourite stretches or hints below.

Exercise that lengthens and stretches muscles may help you prevent injuries, back pain, and balance problems. ... Activities such as Tai Chi, Pilates and yoga combine stretching with relaxation and also improve balance, a wonderful combination.

CAUTION

We should **NEVER** do anything that hurts or feels wrong for us. Only ever do what is right for you and listen to your body. **Don't** bounce during exercises

POSTURE (some call this the boring bit but it is vital to help prevent injuries)

At Pilates class we check posture then begin with gentle, standing, warm up stretches.

You will have heard this before, stand as though you have a puppet string from the top of your head pulling upwards. We note 3 important areas to maintaining good posture and the body's natural curves in the spine.

1. Neck Our head should balance over the spine, not forward. (the head weighs 5Kg) Achieve correct balance point by tucking your chin in.
2. Shoulders should be level, with blades pulled back together and dropped down, towards your bottom. Shoulders relaxed but held back. When sitting or standing your elbows should be at your waist, not in front giving rounded shoulders.
3. Pelvic muscles are firmly drawn in by pulling the navel towards your spine and tucking your bottom slightly under. Maintain a small arch, or "a neutral spine"

At first it is hard to do all three corrections naturally. In class I remind regularly "chin tucked back, shoulders down & back, core muscles engaged."

HINTS If you suffer with lower back pain it is wise, when sitting, to use a small cushion or rolled towel/jumper for support in the curve of your lower back. I always use one on a plane and sometimes at the theatre or in the car.

To help improve core strength, if you can, when you stand up try using engaged core muscles but not your hands to push off.

Now for the good bit – here are some stretches you might choose between, to give relief to tired and aching muscles.

STRETCHES - choose a few that help you – nothing should hurt

Remember keep breathing throughout. It's easy to hold our breath as we try for a longer stretch, but we should keep relaxed, rhythmic breathing and don't bounce. **To begin. check your posture** "chin tucked back, shoulders down & back, core muscles engaged."

1. **Shrugs and Shoulder Rolls** Shrug your shoulders up and down, then roll shoulders forward and back a few times each way.
2. **Stretch** This one should be easy, as it's a natural stretch that we all do when we're feeling a bit stiff and tired. Simply raise your arms above your head, interlock your fingers and push away from yourself. Drop arms to shoulder height, stretch forwards feeling relief in upper back & shoulders.
3. **Reach** one arm up, palm up and your other arm down by your leg with palm down, push up, hold a few seconds then reverse arms. Keep breathing slowly.
4. **Stretching Up** As you breathe in, Rise up on toes and take arms straight up beside your ears then breathe out as you lower heels back to floor - repeat slowly 2 or 3 times. Heels stay on floor if balance is an issue for you.
5. **High Knees** Stand tall your feet a few inches apart. Lift alternate knees high Breath in to take up, breath out to lower. (Basically standing and lifting each knee) x 5 or 6 each leg.
6. **Twist – With Balance Option** Stretch up as in exercise 4 above, stay up on toes, take arms out to your sides and turn your body from the waist. First to one side breathing in, then breathing out to return to face the front. Then twist to the other side and return to middle and lower heels back down. OR
Twist without balance component. The same as above without balancing on your toes.
7. **Arm circles.** Take arms out to the side at shoulder height and make small circles with arms from your shoulders. Next stand on one leg, lifting knee and straighten leg to front, balance then return foot to floor. – Circle arms in the other direction and repeat on the other leg OR
Arms circles without balance component. Circle arms as above standing with feet shoulder width apart. About 10 seconds each way.
8. **Loose Arms** Great for loosening up the body - standing, legs slightly apart, arms hanging loosely beside the body and rotate the body from the waist and shoulders. Arms swing on their own, hold firm from waist down to toes.

9. **Hip Circles** Like you are using a hula hoop - ensure you rotate both directions, about 3 or 4 each way, holding core strongly.
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Perhaps U3A members in Walking and Pilates groups will recognize some of the above. I do hope you might find something useful here to help stretch out during enjoyable pastimes, both your new and old favourites. Stay well, active, and in good spirits.

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