

Restorative exercises in times of stress

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This is an unusual time for all of us. Many of us are spending more time at home than ever before. Our schedules and routines have been thrown out the window. We are navigating through an ever-changing situation resulting in chronic low level stress.

If you are using this opportunity to really make progress on staying steady with your exercise program, good for you! Exercise can certainly help mitigate many of the effects of stress, as well as help us to feel in control. However, in this uniquely stressful time, pause to consider how you can use your movement efforts to contribute to other aspects of your health and well-being.

Exercise challenges our systems by breaking them down, in a sense, to elicit a physiologic response of reinforcing strength for the next challenge. An equally important, yet often overlooked factor in this equation is the anabolic, or “building up” effect.

Many times this part is overlooked because we know this as “rest.” For some, resting is the harder part. We tend to equate this with “inactivity.” Striking a balance between work and rest is a major factor for longevity. Not the “sit on the couch and binge-watch TV” rest, but rather a conscious effort at **restoration**.



WHAT CAN YOU DO AT HOME?

Could you use this time to consider restoring balance and replenishing energy with the same intention that you give to your physical activity efforts? Here are a few suggestions.

BREATHE

Introduce breath work into stretch breaks or daily walks to make a moving meditation. Coordinating the breath with movements restores energy and helps you to mentally plug into the movements, whereas holding your breath blocks much of the energy flow necessary for restoration.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS

Take care of the (not so) minor details. Feet are the unsung heroes of our body. The intrinsic muscles of the foot need strengthened and mobilized just as our other muscles do. Here is a quick barefoot exercise to try called **Short Foot**:

Step 1: Pull all your toes down and in, without having them leave the ground.

Step 2: Contract the arch muscles for three seconds and then release.

Step 3: Repeat this three times per day, three days a week.

REMEMBER NEAT

Non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT) focuses on the daily calories a person burns while doing normal, non-exercise activity. James, Levine, M.D., a noted researcher in the field of NEAT describes it like this: “Don’t sit when you can stand; don’t stand when you can move.”

Apply NEAT concepts to your home office by:

- Varying your positions. Move away from your desk when you can; try standing at the counter or sitting on the floor with your laptop or your phone.
- Walk and talk while you’re on the phone.
- Set alarms for movement breaks.

WARM UP AND COOL DOWN

Often, “lack of time” is the reason given for hurrying through warm up and cool downs. Use this extra time to try some new experiments by using some intentional restorative body work to enhance and improve your regular routine or to balance the effects stress.

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.
– Albert Einstein

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