

Yoga for Neck and Shoulders

The following simple exercises can help relieve stiffness and tension, and help strengthen the neck and shoulders against injury.

However, be careful when working with your neck and shoulders. Move slowly and deliberately. Pay attention to which muscles are being used. Never go beyond your edge of comfort. This isn't a workout, test or competition.

1. **Chin-to-chest** – Inhale and as you exhale slowly lower your chin to your chest, creating a long, gentle stretch along the back of the neck. Take several slow, deep breaths with the chin down. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Lift the head back up on an inhale. Repeat.
2. **Ear-to-shoulder** – Inhale and then as you exhale slowly lower your right ear towards your right shoulder. It won't reach, but don't worry about it. Breathe into the gentle stretch created along the top of the left shoulder and left side of the neck. Take several slow deep breaths. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Inhale and raise your head back up. Repeat on the other side.
3. **Neck roll** – Follow instructions for ear-to-shoulder, then roll the chin down towards the chest, across the chest and up the other side. Inhale and as you exhale, roll the chin down across the chest and up the other side. See how slowly you can do this and really feel which muscles are working, which are stretching as you move from right to left and back again.
4. **Shoulder-to-ears** – Inhale and raise your shoulders up to your ears, pulling them up as high as they'll go. Then let go with an "ahhh" and drop your shoulders back down. Repeat several times.
5. **Shoulder circles** – Raise your shoulders up, rotate them back and down, forward and up again. Do as slowly as possible, again paying attention to areas of restriction. Repeat several times then go in the opposite direction.



6. **Clenched smile** – Grit your teeth and open your lips as wide as they will go. Feel your lips, cheeks, chin and neck stretch to their limit. Hold and release. Repeat.
7. **Scrunches** – Scrunch your face real tight. Purse your lips, draw your cheeks in towards your nose, pull your eyebrows down and bring the flesh of your chin up toward your mouth. Hold and release.