

Foster Care to Good Health

Exercise!

Everyday Exercise

With the stresses of attending and studying for classes, writing papers and completing projects, participating in extracurricular activities and probably working at least a part-time job, you may wonder where exercise can fit into your schedule.

Getting a little exercise is easier than you might think –

- Bicycle or walk to class or work instead of driving, or park farther away than you normally would and walk the extra distance
- Stretch, march in place for few minutes or just walk around during study breaks
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator!
- Sign up for a physical education class as one of your electives – most schools offer everything from yoga and judo to basketball for credit

Even such a small amount of physical activity has great health benefits, such as boosting your energy and reducing the risks of heart disease, obesity and diabetes among other illnesses. Exercise, along with healthy eating, helps to build and maintain strong bones, muscles and joints, and perhaps most importantly for a college student, induces a good night's sleep. A side benefit of exercise, of course, is that the gym, the mountaineering club, the 8:00 a.m. yoga class, the swim team, *whatever*, are all great places to meet people with similar interests.

Exercise of a different sort – just working your muscles a little bit, tensing and then relaxing them, is an excellent way to reduce stress. Here are some exercises that are especially good. Of course, don't do these exercises if they are uncomfortable or painful, and if you have any physical problems or disabilities, check with your clinic, doctor or physical therapist before you attempt them. In the meantime, though, why don't you photocopy them and put them on your wall?

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Stay where you are and exercise!

Hands, arms and shoulders

- Hands - bend and straighten fingers several times to increase blood flow
- Hands - let fingers and hands hang loosely from your wrists; gently shake hands
- Hands - clench your fists and curl your wrists inward; curl your wrists back; rotate fists in circles
- Arms - straighten your arms against your sides and press tightly; release; repeat
- Arms - gently bend arms at the elbows (as though lifting imaginary weights); repeat several times to increase blood flow to arms
- Arms and shoulders - if you can (and it's comfortable), raise your arms above your head and grasp your hands together; stretch toward the sky; bring your arms back to your sides and try to reach behind you, clasping hands; feel your chest expand and stretch your shoulders and arms; repeat
- Shoulders - with your arms at your side, lift your shoulders high (toward your ears) and then release; repeat
- Shoulders - if you can (and it's comfortable), keep your arms at your side and roll your shoulder in forward circles; stop after several rotations and switch directions

Head, neck and face

- Face - wiggle your face! raise and lower your eyebrows; puff out your cheeks; relax your jaw (these exercises are best done in private or to entertain small children)
- Face - gently massage your ears: pull down gently on your ear lobes and massage them; release and gently grab your entire ear, gently rotating it in small circles
- Head and neck - without moving your shoulders or spine, look to the left; look to the right; look up raising your chin gently no more than three inches; look down; repeat; stop at any point if this doesn't feel comfortable or becomes painful
- Head and neck - close your eyes and let your head slowly fall forward; slowly roll your head to the right then to the left; don't pull or strain; repeat as necessary; stop at any point if this doesn't feel comfortable or becomes painful

Back and spine

- Back and spine - sitting or standing straight, keep your hips facing forward and gently turn your upper body to the left; return to center; gently turn your upper body to the right; return to center; repeat; stop at any point if this doesn't feel comfortable or becomes painful
- Back and spine - sit up straight with your back against a firm chair or stand up straight with your back against the wall and your feet about a foot away from the wall; gently push your chest out so that your spine curves away from the wall/chair back; return to center with your spine flat against the wall/chair; pull your stomach in and curve your spine toward the

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wall/chair so that your shoulders and bottom pull away from the wall/chair; return to center; repeat; stop at any point if this doesn't feel comfortable or becomes painful

Feet, ankles, legs and hips

- Feet - wiggle your toes! Slip off your shoes; wiggle your toes and feet; try to grab the rug or a small object with just your toes (Somehow, this feels best of all, doesn't it? Remember wiggling your toes in the mud when you were a child?)
- Ankles - point your toes and feel the top of your feet and ankles stretch; straighten your toes and pushing down through your heels, pull your toes toward your shins to stretch in the other direction
- Ankles - rotate your feet in circles; switch directions
- Legs and hips - in a seated position, straighten your legs in front of you; pushing down through your heels, pull your toes toward you and stretch your calves and thighs
- Legs and hips - squeeze that bottom! Tighten and release your thighs and buttocks to return circulation to an often ignored area and work out those muscles; release; repeat five times

You may feel silly doing some of these exercises the first time, but try them – they will really help to reduce your stress and make you feel better.