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Desk Tai Chi: Reduce Your Workday Stress Without Leaving Your Office

By "Dr. Ron" Knaus

On the job stress has reached an alarming rate. According to Princeton Survey Research Associates, three-fourths of employees believe today's workers have more on-the-job stress than a generation ago. Additionally, one-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives. Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than are any other life-stressor—more so than even financial problems or family problems.

The result of all this stress can be devastating, from chronic health challenges to severe workplace injuries. Even more alarming is the fact that healthcare expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress. In light of all these findings, what's a worker to do?

Obviously, keeping a healthy life balance is key to reducing stress. This means getting proper rest and nutrition, exercising regularly, engaging in hobbies for mental relaxation, and having a strong emotional support system in place. But, with today's jam-packed schedules, there isn't enough time to breathe, let alone establish and maintain a healthy life balance. And what about those sudden slip-ups at work that send stress levels through the roof?

To help relieve workday stress, many people are turning to Tai Chi, a self-paced, non-competitive series of slow, flowing body movements ("forms") that emphasize acute concentration, relaxation, and the conscious circulation of vital energy throughout the body. Tai Chi is a martial art based on the Eastern belief that a life force (chi) or energy circulates throughout the body by way of pathways called meridians. A disruption of this energy flow (such as through stress) is believed to result in illness or injury. Therefore, a balance of chi is essential for health, and Tai Chi is an exercise that promotes this proper flow of energy.

Unlike other exercises, such as cardiovascular workouts or weight training, Tai Chi is something anyone can do, and they can do it anywhere—even sitting behind a desk in a cubicle. By doing the following simple yet effective Tai Chi Forms at work every day, you will get your body moving, relax your mind and experience the benefits of stress reduction.

As you do each of the following Tai Chi Forms, realize that you are not

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striving for perfection, but for relief of stress while increasing your personal energy. Why? Because the more energy you have, the better you can handle the stresses of working life. Do each of the following forms in sequence—that is Form 1 leads directly into Form 2, which leads into Form 3, and so on. The entire sequence takes only a few short minutes to complete; yet it delivers high results that you'll experience immediately.

Form 1: "Removing Egg from Bird Nest": Start by sitting in a chair; exhale while you drop your arms to your side and make sure you drop your shoulders. Bring your fingers and thumbs together on the right and left, as though you were lifting an egg out of a bird's nest. Inhale while extending your arms laterally, keeping your elbows slightly bent, and very slowly bring your arms over your head. If you can, touch your wrists above your head. At this point let go of the egg. As you bring your arms down, push out with your hands. This will stretch out the carpal tunnel area and reduce the possibility of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Slowly bring your arms and hands to your sides. When your arms are at 45-degree angle, you are forming the letter A. The benefit of this firm form is that you stretch the shoulder girdle, increase your lung capacity with an influx of oxygen, and stretch the tendons and muscles used in typing.

Form 2: "Stoke the Sparrows Back": From the letter A position, bring your arms to the front and grasp an imaginary "Energy Ball," keeping your right arm (hand facing down) on top and your left arm about twelve inches below (hand facing up). As you grasp the Energy Ball, bring your right arm down and place your right hand on your right hip while you extend your left arm high above your head. The movement should represent you stroking a bird's back feathers with your right hand, while your left hand slides upward under the bird's neck. As you move your hands and arms, sit tall in your chair, extending your back to the ceiling. The benefit of this form is that you bring oxygen in while extending the spine upward, warding off the constant pull of gravity.

Form 3: "Capture the Wave": From the previous form, inhale and grasp the Energy Ball again, with your right hand on top and left hand below, about twelve inches apart. Feel the energy between your hands. Slowly rotate your waist and body to the right while extending your arms to the right to grasp an imaginary wave (about 24 inches in height). Make the letter C with your fingers and thumb with each hand. Exhale as you extend. Now, as you inhale, bring your arms back to center to grasp the Energy Ball. This time, rotate your left arm and hand to the top of the Energy Ball and your right arm and hand to the bottom, again about twelve inches apart. Then, while exhaling, extend your arms out to the left, making the letter C with your fingers and thumb. The benefit of this form is to rotate the spine, the waist, and the pelvis while strengthening the body core.

Form 4: "Stoke the Sparrows Back": From the letter C position, repeat form #2, but on the opposite side, ending with the right arm and hand extended above the head. Come back to center grasping the Energy Ball, with your right hand on top.

Form 5: "Kick the Stars": From the center position of holding the Energy Ball (with your right hand on top) slowly bring your right hand and

arm down to behind your chair, while slowly extending your right leg to a 90-degree angle from the pelvis. Extend your left hand and arm upward as your toes kick the stars. Reverse and repeat with the opposite side. You may point your toes toward your nose to stretch your back leg tendons and muscles while extending the spine. The benefit of this form is to expand your breathing capacity while increasing oxygen to the body, stretching leg muscles, and giving energy back to the system while reducing stress.

Reclaim Your Vital Energy Today: While Tai Chi delivers numerous stress reducing benefits, it is only one tool in your anti-stress arsenal. Combine some daily Tai Chi with proper diet, rest, and emotional and mental support and relaxation. Soon you'll be able to handle any workday challenge without the negative stress implications.

So if you're ready to ease your workday so you can be more productive and less stressed, then give Tai Chi a try. By doing so, you'll be able to reclaim the energy that stress depletes, causing you to be happier, healthier, and more successful in everything you do.

"Dr. Ron" Knaus is a physician, psychiatrist, and sports medicine physician who works within the medical profession and corporate world, helping them reach peak performance levels. His clients include celebrities, professional athletes, and business executives. He has received board certifications from the American Osteopathic Board of Psychiatry and Neurology and the American Osteopathic Academy of Sports Medicine. For more information please contact Dr. Ron at rknaus@peakenergyinstitute.com or 727-215-8104.

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