



Physiotherapists:
The Body Specialists

Physio Tips

TRAVEL FIT

Physiotherapy Association of BC

Travel Fit Tips

Whatever the mode of travel, sitting immobile for prolonged periods of time can put considerable stress on muscles and joints. This can lead to feeling stiff, cramped and sore with a sense of fatigue after the journey.

Good posture plays a key role in the prevention of back pain and excessive strain on the joints, ligaments and veins. However, even good posture can become uncomfortable over an extended period of time. Frequent posture changes to help minimize discomfort.

Physiotherapists recommend these posture tips:

- If the hollow in your back is not supported, try a lumbar roll or rolled up T-shirt;
- Keep shoulders in line with trunk and upper back to allow for even loading through the spine;
- Hips and knees should be as close to a 90 degree angle as possible to maintain good spinal alignment.
- Depending on transportation policy, a backpack or other piece of carry-on luggage can act as a footrest to bring legs and knees to a comfortable height; preferably at 90 degrees.
- Position the arm rest so your elbows are bent to 90 degrees. If your arm rest is too low, use a small pillow under your forearm.
- Shift your weight frequently to reduce prolonged pressure points when sitting, including moving hips and knees.
- Keep headrest centered in the back of your head. Adjust the chair to an upright position so that your seat is at the back of the chair.
- If you're driving, change the angle of the steering wheel at rest stops as a way to change your sitting position.

Physiotherapists recommend doing one exercise from each of the following groups before, during and after the journey, to maintain good general circulation, and decrease stiffness by moving the joints. Slowly stretch until a gentle tension is felt in the muscle (this should not be painful). Take relaxed breaths and do each exercise slowly, repeating twice on both sides.

Head and neck:

- Head Turn – turn head over right shoulder and back to centre;
- Head Tilt – bring ear towards shoulder without turning head or lifting shoulder;
- Neck Bend – tuck in chin and slowly bring towards chest. Slowly return to start position;
- Neck Extension – raise chin to ceiling and look up as far as you can. Slowly return to start position;

Shoulders

- Shoulder Stretch – link fingers together and push up with palms facing upwards;
- Shoulders Back – squeeze shoulder blades together. Expand rib cage with each breath;
- Shoulders Forward – cross arms across chest and hold back of shoulders with hands. Hug shoulders forward so that a stretch is felt between shoulder blades;
- Shoulder Rolls – Shrug shoulders. Make circles with one shoulder, then the other. Touch shoulder blades together and relax. Repeat three or four times.

Trunk

- Body Twist – turn body and head to look over right shoulder. Reach left hand across the body to hold on to top right edge of chair. Repeat on opposite side;
- Back Arch – arch back until pelvis tilts forward. Try to breath normally;



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- **Back Slump** – slump forwards and bring shoulders towards knees as far as comfortable. Keep stomach relaxed. Pelvis should tilt backwards;
- **Body Stretch** – find suitable location and stand with feet shoulder-width apart and as tall as you can. Push hips forward without losing balance and reach arms straight above head, linking fingers with palms facing upwards.

Foot and ankle

- **Sitting Calf Stretch** – keep left heel on floor, lift toes and the front of the foot as far off the floor as possible. Repeat on opposite side;
- **Foot Pumping** – pump each foot several times, as if working a car accelerator, to bring back circulation to feet and ankles.
- **Heel Lifts** – lean forward and rest elbows on knees. Keeping full weight on elbows, lift heels off the floor as far as you can, keeping balls of feet in contact with floor. Gently lower down and repeat several times;
- **Ankle Circles** – lift left foot off floor and pull upwards and at the same time roll foot inwards. Then push the foot downwards and roll it outwards. Repeat 20 times on each side.

For all seated stretches and exercises, sit tall in the seat with your ear, shoulder and hip roughly in line with each other, and feet slightly apart.

Arms should be resting comfortably with your hands in your lap.

Exercises should be performed on both sides of the body.

It is especially important to remember to exercise if using a laptop computer or doing other work while traveling.

Many people become so engrossed that they fail to take a break for hours at a time and end up with pain and stiffness in the neck or hands upon reaching their destination.

Physiotherapists are experts in movement and mobility, body mechanics, muscles and joints. They will help develop an exercise program specially-tailored to your needs, putting together the right combination of activities to improve physical fitness and avoid injury.

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