5 Strengthening Exercises to Stay Active throughout Your Day

Staying active is always important for our physical well-being. It improves blood flow and metabolism, reduces stress and anxiety, and keeps our musculoskeletal system healthy.

During this stressful time, it’s even more important to spend time moving our body. The five strengthening exercises below can be completed anywhere – in clinic, your office or at home – and at varying intensity levels, from basic to advanced. They can be completed independently throughout your day or as a 15-minute or 30-minute at-home workout.

**EXERCISE 1: SEATED DEAD BUG**

**Benefits:** Strengthen abdominals, improve posture  
**Level:** Basic  
**Body Part:** Arms  
**Position:** Upright posture  
- Take a deep breath in through the nose.  
- The belly should expand, followed by the chest expanding (diaphragmatic breath).  
- After the inhale, breathe out through your mouth, tighten your core muscles (abdominal bracing) while slowly raising both arms out in front of you, parallel to the floor (like you are holding a ball out in front of the chest).  
- Raise one arm above your head.  
- Keep your core engaged and braced.  
- Slowly lower your arm back to parallel and then repeat the movement with the opposite arm.

**Level:** Basic  
**Body Part:** Legs  
- Sit toward the middle of the chair.  
- Maintain an upright posture and neutral spine.  
- Place your hands on either side of the chair or arm rest and grip firmly.  
- Bend your knees and lift the right bent leg at a comfortable level.  
- Return the leg to the start position.  
- Lift the left bent leg at a comfortable level.  
- Return the leg to the start position.
**Level:** Advanced  
**Body Part:** Core  
- Lift the bent left leg as high as it will go; aim for hip height (maintain good posture and keep the core braced).  
- Hold for one second.  
- Return the left leg to the start position and lift the right leg.

**Level:** Advanced  
**Body Part:** Core, Arms, Legs  
- Sit toward the middle of the chair.  
- Maintain an upright posture and neutral spine.  
- Lift the left leg with the right arm (opposite arm opposite leg).  
- Hold for one second.  
- Return the left leg and lift the right leg and the left arm.

**EXERCISE 2: REVERSE FLY**  
**Benefits:** Improve posture, strengthen back, abdominals and shoulders  
**Level:** All  
- Sit on the edge of the chair.  
- Take a big, deep breath in to take a diaphragmatic breath (same as Exercise 1); maintain a neutral spine, inhale through the nose.  
- On exhale, focus on bracing the abdominals.  
- Lean forward slightly, keeping your back engaged and pull the shoulder blades back.  
- Start with your arms in front of the body, palms facing each other.  
- Maintain a tight back/proud chest position.  
- Raise your arms out straight to the side so you look like a T position; hold for two-three seconds.  
- Slowly return to the starting position.  
- Repeat.

**EXERCISE 3: CHAIR SQUATS**  
**Benefits:** Strengthen legs and abdominals  
**Level:** Basic  
- Sit upright in your chair and push off the chair.  
- Tighten your abdominals and slowly rise up from the chair over a five-second count.  
- Fully rise until you are standing in upright position.  
- Slowly, over a five-second count, return to a seated position.  
- Make sure the chair is stable and unable to roll.  
- Push through the heels.  
- Make sure your knees do not go far in front of your toes.

**Level:** Advanced  
- Stand up from the chair without using your hands to push off the chair (five-second count movement).  
- Keep abdominals braced/engage core muscles.  
- Return to a seated position.  
- Hover over the chair (do not sit) and then return to an upright position.  
- Make sure the chair is stable and unable to roll.  
- Push through the heels.  
- Make sure your knee does not go too far in front of your toes.
EXERCISE 4: LUNGES

Benefits: Promote upright posture, strengthen abdominals and legs

Level: Basic
- Perform this seated lunge exercise in a chair without an arm rest.
- Sit upright (keep abdominals braced) with your left leg and buttock fully on the seat at a 90-degree angle; suspend your right leg and buttock off of the seat.
- The right hip is extended to neutral position, knee at a 90-degree angle and balance on the ball of the foot.
- Keep both knees bent with your left foot flat. Support the body with the opposite hand.
- Switch and sit on the opposite side of the chair. Support the body with the opposite hand.

Level: Advanced
- Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart and keep your core engaged.
- Take a big step forward with your right leg; shift your weight forward so your heel hits the ground first.
- Your back hip is extended, knee slightly bent and bend both knees to 90 degrees.
- Lower your body down until your right thigh is parallel to the floor and your right knee is directly above your ankle.
- Press into your right heel; balance on the ball of the left foot to drive back to the starting position.
- Repeat on the other side.
- Do not allow your knees to push forward past the toes and keep your back straight in an upright position. Hold movement for five seconds.

EXERCISE 5: PUSH-UPS

Benefits: Strengthen abdominals and shoulders

Level: Basic
- This is a seated version.
- Sit in an upright position in the middle of the chair.
- Place your hands on the desk, shoulder-width apart and your palms flat.
- Make sure your chair is an arm-length away from the desk.
- Lean the body forward, bending your elbows to 90 degrees.
- Hold this position for two to three seconds. Lift the head, neck and shoulders at the same time while keeping your abdominal muscles braced.
- Return to the starting position with your back upright.

Level: Basic
- This is a standing wall version.
- Standing arm-length away from the wall, face the wall with hands and feet shoulder-width apart.
- Lean your body forward and put your palms flat against the wall at shoulder height.
- Slowly breathe in as you bend your elbows and lower your upper body toward the wall in a slow, controlled motion.
- Hold the position for one second.
- Keep the head, neck and shoulders in a neutral position.
- Return to the start position, arm-length away, palms flat.
- Keep abdominal muscles braced.
Level: Advanced
- Follow the same steps as the Basic standing wall version.
- For an added benefit, move to the floor on a mat or a lower surface.
- In this Advanced version, move in a five-count movement to lower your body; hold the position for two seconds or more.
- For another added benefit, stretch for the legs when leaning forward to perform the push-up; try to keep your feet flat.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE
Challenge: Try to complete 10,000 steps a day this week and challenge your coworkers.

One of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Healthy People 2020 objectives is to encourage more people to walk. For many of us, walking is a simple, accessible, affordable and efficient method of exercising. Research suggests regular walking for everyday travel can be as effective as structured workouts for health and wellness.

Even during this challenging time, walking can be a safe method for improving your health status, while also maintaining appropriate social distancing standards. Try to go for a 15-minute walk every day and keep track of your step count.