Stretching Exercises for Wheelchair Users

- **Elbow Pull**
  - Hold your left elbow with your right hand.
  - Gently pull your elbow behind your head until an easy stretch is felt in your shoulder or the back of your upper arm (triceps).
  - Repeat exercise for your other arm.

- **Elbow Pull and Lean**
  - Begin with the same stretch as above, now gently pull your elbow behind your head until an easy stretch is felt.
  - Gently lean sideways from your hips to stretch along the side of your upper body.

  **Caution:** Trunk weakness may require you to use a safety strap or for someone to watch you to prevent falls during this stretch.

- **Palms Up**
  - Interlace your fingers from one hand with those of your opposite hand.
  - Raise your arms above your head with your palms facing up.
  - Push your arms slightly back and up. Feel the stretch in your arms, shoulders and upper back.
Over the Shoulder
- Keeping your hips straight ahead in the chair, turn your upper body to the right and then to the left.
- Turn so you are looking over your shoulder. This exercise will create a stretch in your back and sides.

Caution: Persons with spine-stabilizing hardware, such as Harrington Rods, may be restricted in twisting. Persons with chest or back injuries should have their doctor’s approval before doing this exercise.

Palms Forward
- Interlace your fingers with your palms facing out and your arms extended out in front of you at shoulder height.
- Extend your arms forward to stretch your shoulders, mid-upper back, arms, hand, fingers and wrists.

Elbow Across
- Pull your elbow gently across your chest toward your opposite shoulder until you feel a comfortable stretch.
- Repeat with your other elbow.

Shoulder Shrug
This stretch is good for relieving stiffness and tension in the shoulders and neck.
- Pull the top of your shoulders up towards your earlobes and hold for 5 to 8 seconds.
- Relax completely and allow your shoulders to drop down naturally.
- Repeat this several times.
- **Head Tilt**
  - Use good posture while sitting in the chair.
  - Tilt your head to the left side, and at the same time, allow your right shoulder to move downward. This will create a stretch along the side of your neck.
  - Repeat on the other side.

- **Forward Body Bend**
  - Bend forward to stretch the areas from your neck through your lower back. This is also a good weight shift position and may be done with a pillow on your lap.
  - Find a comfortable position and hold it for about 1 to 2 minutes.
  - To sit up, put your hands on your thighs and push your upper body to an upright position.

- **Shoulder Blades Together**
  - Interlace your fingers behind your head, keeping your elbows straight out to your sides. Keep your upper body in an upright position in the center.
  - Pull your shoulder blades together to create a feeling of tension through your upper back and shoulder blades.
  - Hold this tension for 8 to 12 seconds and then relax.
  - Repeat several times.

- **Neck Stretch**
  - Sitting in an upright position in the center of your chair, interlace your fingers on the back of your head.
  - Gently pull your head downward until you feel a slight stretch in the back of your neck.

**Caution:** Persons with cervical spine injuries should have their doctor’s approval before doing this stretch.
Knee to Chest

- Pull your knee toward your chest until you feel an easy stretch.
- Hold this easy stretch until the tension disappears, and then stretch a little further until you feel a mild, comfortable tension again.
- Repeat for your other leg.

Knee Across

- Pull your knee across your body toward your opposite shoulder to stretch the outside of your upper leg.
- Hold this for 30 to 40 seconds.
- Repeat for your other leg.

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.
For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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