A guide to microbreaks with practical exercises
Why microbreak?

• To avoid prolonged static postures
• Ensures a healthy musculoskeletal system
• Allows stressed body tissues to rest/recover
• Prolonged sitting, standing or physical labour, fatigues body tissues (e.g. muscles)
• Re-energizes the brain
• Increases productivity
Quick guidelines

• Recommend a 1-2 minute microbreak following 20-30 minutes of sitting
• Should aim toward a 1:1 sit-stand ratio
• Suggest a postural change following 30 minutes of static standing

• Microbreak in opposite/different posture:
  – if you sit for long periods: get up, move around and stretch
  – if you stand stationary for long periods: sit, rest and stretch
  – if you work in awkward postures or perform physical labour: rest the active muscles, and stretch to improve muscle balance and posture
Safety

- If you have an injury, please consult with your health care provider before performing stretches.
- STOP if you feel pain or severe discomfort. Consult your doctor for advice.
- NEVER perform stretches that cause discomfort.

Photo credit: www.nbc29.com
Stretching

DO

• Ensure your body is warmed up before stretching
• Engage your core, but breathe normally
• Move/Bend with your HIP joints, not with your low back

NEVER

• Bounce
• Push/pull excessively
• Lock the knees of your supporting leg(s)
Pick a couple stretches per microbreak

PRACTICAL EXERCISES
Eyes

- Close your eyes. Cup your hands and place them lightly over your eyes. Rest your elbows on your desk and breathe deeply for a minute.
- Focus on a distant object (at least 20 feet away).
- Look up, down, and side to side without moving your head.

Photo credit: homeremediess.com
Fingers

- Separate and straighten your fingers until you feel a stretch. Hold 10 seconds
- Relax
- Bend your fingers at the knuckles. Hold 10 seconds
- Repeat first outward stretch once more

Photo credit: 1) www.osteoinfo.com.au 2) www.rsipain.com
Forearms/Wrist

- Arm straight, palm facing down, gently push on back of the hand to point the fingers down until you feel a stretch. Hold 3-5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times
- Point the fingers upward, place hand on palm and press until you feel a stretch. Hold for 3-5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times
- Elbows on table and palms together, slowly lower wrists to table until you feel a stretch. Keep palms together throughout stretch. Hold 3-5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 3 times

Photo credits: ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/office/stretching.html
Neck

- Lower chin to chest keeping shoulders straight
- Hold 15-20 sec

- Rotate head to one side keeping shoulders straight
- Hold 15-20 sec
- Rotate other side

- Tilt head to bring ear to one shoulder (do not raise shoulder)
- Hold 15-20 sec
- Repeat other side

Photo credit: 1) stretchify.com 2) tclinic.co.uk. 3) calewellphysicaltherapy.com/neck_exercises
Neck

- Sit or stand tall
- Bring right arm behind back, diagonally
- Rotate head 45 degrees to the left
- Place left hand behind on your head and gently pull neck toward your left knee for 15 to 20 seconds
- Repeat with opposite side

Photo credits: 1) www.kybbmassage.com 2) www.physiowarzish.in
Shoulders

• Stand tall. With arms held out to side at shoulder height, rotate arms in forward direction making progressively larger circles
• Repeat in opposite direction
• 8-10 in each direction
Shoulders/Upper Back

• Keep your arm straight and bring it across body horizontally. Pull your arm in to your body by pressing your other hand just above your elbow
• Hold 15-20 seconds
• Repeat with opposite arm

Photo credit: www.iposture.com
Shoulders/Chest/Upper Back

- Stand tall
- Arms at chest level, gently swing arms back and forth
- Repeat 8-10 times
Shoulders/Mid Back

Stand tall and repeat each 8-10 times

• Gently swing arms up and down (front to back)

• Gently swing arms up and down (to the side)

• Elbows at shoulder height, rotate hands straight up and down

Photo credits: brooksidepress.org
Chest/Shoulders

• Head upright, shoulders back and down, clasp your hands behind your back, slowly turning your elbows inward (imagine grasping a ball)
• Lift your arms up behind you until you feel a stretch
• Hold for 15-20 seconds
Chest

- Sit or stand tall
- With shoulders and elbows at 90 degrees, bring elbows back and squeeze shoulder blades together and down
- Hold 15-20 seconds
Chest

• Stand in doorway or next to a wall
• Bend the arm being stretched and place the forearm flat against the wall or doorframe, elbow a little higher than shoulder
• Step forward and rotate your body away from your outstretched arm
• Hold 15-20 seconds
• Repeat with other arm

Photo credit: stretchify.com
Mid Back/Shoulders

- Take a deep breath and reach up over your head with both arms
- Hold 15-20 seconds
- Exhale and lower arms slowly

Photo credit: www.webmd.com
Mid Back/Shoulders/Side Core

- Raise arms overhead, palms facing ceiling
- Reach toward the sky (do not arch back)
- Slowly lean to right while keeping the tension of the reach, drawing ribcage down as you bend
- Hold 3-5 seconds
- Return to upright. Repeat with other side

Photo credit: trinitychiro.com
Mid/Upper Back

- Sit tall with knees at 90 degrees
- Grasp the armrest on one side of your chair with both hands
- Gently rotate through the torso toward your hands, pulling gently to increase the stretch
- Breath full inhales and exhales
- Hold 15-20 seconds
- Repeat on other side

Photo credit: www.bodyandsoul.ca
Mid Back/Hips

• Stand tall, hips pointing forward
• Raise arms to the sides shoulder level. Rotate torso at 90 degrees to your right, rotating the hips also, then return and rotate to left
• Repeat 10 times
Hips/Low Back

- Place left ankle over right leg, just above knee
- Slowly bend forward at the hips (do not round back)
- Hold 15-20 seconds
- Switch sides and repeat
Hips

You may wish to place padding under knee for support

- Kneel on right knee
- Place left foot in front of you, knee bent
- Place hands at waist as a guide to avoid bending the waist
- With back straight, engage core and buttocks and push pelvis down and forward, shifting weight into front leg
- Hold 15-20 seconds
- Switch legs and repeat

(deeper hip flexor stretch)

Photo credits: 1) sportskneetherapy.com 2) fitnessrevolutionrowlett.com
Glutes/Low Back

- Stand tall. Bring one knee up towards the chest. Hug knee, hold for 2 seconds
- Repeat with other leg
- 8-10 per leg
Glutes/Quads/Hamstrings

• Stand tall, feet shoulder-width apart
• Take a large step forward with one foot and lower body straight down by lowering back knee toward the floor. Stop just before touching knee to floor
• Raise back to standing position
• Repeat with other leg
• Repeat 5-8 times per leg
Quads/Hamstrings

• Stand tall, feet facing outwards, slightly wider than shoulder-width apart
• Slowly descend, hinging at hips
  – Plant your feet, support body weight through heels
  – Shift buttocks backward before descending
  – Knees stay in line with toes, or behind
  – Back stays neutral (shoulders back, chest tall, natural low back curve maintained)
• Dig heels into the floor to stand back up, straightening knees and bringing hips forward
• 8-10 repetitions; stop if form begins to suffer

Photo credit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kzSgz9JlU
Quads

- Stand tall and place one hand on solid structure for balance
- Grab an ankle/pant leg and bring heel towards buttocks
- Gently push hips forward
- Hold 15-20 seconds
Hamstrings/Calves

• Place one leg in front of the other
• Bend the back knee and support your weight on the bent leg
• Pointing your front toes upward, flex at the hips (maintaining neutral spine) until you feel a stretch
• Hold 15-20 seconds
• Alternate method: Use a platform to rest front foot on and raise it’s height as capability increases

Photo credits: 1) www.teachpe.com 2) fitness.stackexchange.com 3) fitness.stackexchange.com
Treat microbreaks like an essential job duty.

By doing so, you will reduce your risk of MSIs!