

Back pain? Stiff neck? Tense shoulders?
Here's how you can get immediate relief —
with lasting benefits:



FlexAware® First Aid

The first thing to do is exhale. Just exhale more slowly than usual, and more completely. Gently emphasize your exhaling, and inhaling becomes easier.

Second is to add some movement that feels comfortable. As you exhale, also bend, slouch, shift your weight. Reverse that movement as you inhale. Any comfortable movement is good. Smaller and slower is better. Just bend or slouch as you exhale, and straighten as you inhale. Sense the movement in your pelvis and hip joints, your center or core, and seek to move your pelvis smoothly and easily. Let your head, shoulders, and arms move effortlessly; or you can also move them somewhat actively in ways that feel good.

Here's why this is so effective: When moving comfortably, muscles relax. That means less pressure on joints, cartilage, and other tissues, better circulation and healthier nerve activity. Also true is the converse: Muscles held in any fixed position tend to contract, pinching nerves, blood vessels, spinal discs, and so on, sometimes causing pain and inflammation.

You can do this anywhere, sitting in your car, at your desk, even while using a computer, and standing or lying. Your movements can be so small that people near you don't notice. If it feels good, however, make movements that are larger, more varied, more playful. If people notice and ask, you can tell them you're doing **FlexAware**. You might invite them to join you.

The only hard part with this is remembering to do it. Some suggestions: Keep this article handy and reread it occasionally. Post notes at your desk, in your car, and other places where you commonly experience pain, stress, stiffness. Ask family members, friends, and co-workers to remind you to exhale and move. Pain can also be a reminder.

For greater benefit, imagine that your trunk — your pelvis, spine, ribs, and breastbone, the whole structure from your hip joints to the base of your neck — is a sponge. Exhaling is like squeezing a sponge, with your ribs like fingers. When you release a sponge it fills automatically. Similarly, inhaling can be effortless. Just receive the breath as you return to a neutral, more vertical position.

Squeeze the sponge and bend. Pause. Then receive the breath as you straighten. Slowly and easily. Sense the movement at your hip joints and pelvis and all around.

Another useful image for your trunk is a balloon. When a balloon deflates, it bends, twists, softens, and gets smaller. As you exhale, be aware of your back and sides and all around the balloon that is your trunk, and seek to move more freely and easily everywhere. When a balloon inflates, it expands in all directions and becomes more firm. As you inhale, sense your movement all around and notice where you become more firm.

Play with this balloon that is your trunk, letting the air out while bending or twisting, and inflating again as you return to a neutral position. These sponge and balloon images, and the associated movements, are the key to **FlexAware Breathing**.

The structure of your ribs really is quite flexible; it's not a rigid cage. Your ribs and spine move in your back, even beneath and between your shoulderblades. And your shoulderblades and collarbones glide over your ribs and spine.

Even more effective is doing this while lying on your back, in bed or on the floor. It's good to place a firm pillow or a book behind your head to lift it an inch or two, maybe more, to a comfortable height; that supports the natural curve in your neck and helps your neck muscles relax. Bend your legs so your feet are standing. Your arms can be wherever you like.

With this as the neutral position, gently emphasize exhaling. Inhale easily, effortlessly, as you practice your **FlexAware Breathing**. Sense the movement in your ribs all around. Add some comfortable movement. As you exhale, tilt your legs, lift your pelvis, move your shoulders; any movement that feels good. As you inhale, return to your neutral initial position.

The main idea, again, is to move easily, pleasantly, comfortably. As your muscles relax, you can make the movements more varied, larger perhaps, or faster, or in different directions.

The more you practice these movements, the more effective they are for relieving pain and recovering from stress. And for preventing pain. You might make this part of your daily routine, a warm-up or cool-down with any type of exercise or sport. In bed, you might do this before you get up in the morning and to rock yourself to sleep at night.

These **FlexAware** practices are simple and natural and remarkably effective.

For more information about **FlexAware** classes, workshops, individual sessions, and Teacher Education Programs, please visit www.FlexAware.com or phone 202-640-1373.

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