



## **STEF HANSON** PERSONAL TRAINING

I recently caught up with a friend and fellow triathlete, let's call him Jon, and chewed the fat over a few creamy, silky caffeine hits. We discussed current events such as our bro, John So stepping down as Mayor and Icon of Melbourne (Politics... Check); how the "ridiculously good looking" team, Brangelina, was going to cope with the arrival of their twins (Celebrity gossip... Check); how we had to walk to the coffee shop because the price of petrol is forcing us to (Economics... Check) and; the Emma's and the rest of the Aussies killing it at the Beijing Olympics, the Hawks soaring higher than the Cats, Lance's potential comeback in The Tour Down Under and how Arsenal are sitting much prettier on the ladder than Manchester United (Sport... Check, check, check and check). However, despite our extremely intellectual conversation, Jon started getting restless. I knew it wasn't the coffee jitters that were making him fidget in his seat like a seven year old who had just been told he couldn't leave the table until he had finished all of his broccoli, and surely it wasn't the company he was keeping? He was clearly uncomfortable and obviously suffering from a fair amount of pain. He had just spent another long day sitting at his desk, staring at the computer screen, and only getting out of his chair for toilet breaks, to raid the charity chocolate box or to top up his water bottle. His pain, while extremely annoying for him, guided me towards writing this particular article. Last issue, I discussed poor posture and how to counteract muscle imbalances, commonly found in triathletes, by following a structured resistance routine. In this issue I'm going to write about stretching those muscles that have shortened and tightened from training, but paying special attention to the Age Groupers, like Jon, who spend a lot of time training, but who also find themselves sitting at their desks at work for forty plus hours a week in order to subsidize their next pair of sneakers or the latest, lightest pair of racing wheels.

Just between you and I, sometimes I may forget to factor in stretching after every training session and race, but I have made it my mission this season to always allow time for stretching when I'm planning my sessions, because I really do know how important it is, and, well, it's best I practice what I preach. I know that you're all conscientious triathletes and I am assuming that you all incorporate a stretching program into your training sessions, right? (Mmm, you're all smiling and nodding right now aren't you?). So with this in mind, I'm going to concentrate on stretches you can do at the office to keep yourself supple and pain free throughout your working day.

Being confined to an office chair for hours on end places a lot of stress on the back, can create poor posture and causes tightness in the traps, pectorals, shoulders, erector spinae, hip flexors and hamstrings, all of which will have an effect on your training. I haven't worked in an office environment for over six years now, but when I did, we organized two stretching sessions a day targeting these tight muscles. It took twenty minutes in total and the feedback was extremely positive. Try to hold the following stretches for about thirty seconds each, remembering to breathe (crazy, I know) and relax. You want to feel a slight level of discomfort as you stretch out those tight areas, but you certainly don't want to be feeling any pain.

**Stretching your traps** - Stay seated, make sure you're sitting up tall, chest is out, shoulder blades are back and your core is switched on. Place your right hand under your backside, lean your head down towards your left shoulder and you should feel a stretch up through the right hand side of your neck. For a more intense stretch, keep your head where it is, but try to rotate it back so that you're looking over your right shoulder. You should now also feel the stretch moving up behind your right ear. Now reverse all of this and stretch the left hand side of your neck.

**Stretching your pectorals** – Again, focusing on your posture, find a wall, a partition, or a water cooler to lean against, or perhaps a friendly co-worker who also wants to stretch. Bring your elbow up to shoulder height, with your arm bent at a right angle. Keep your forearm pressed up against whatever you've decided to use and rotate your body in an anti clockwise direction, away from your arm which will stretch out your chest and the front of your shoulder. Again, turn around and stretch the other side, turning clockwise away from your arm.

Stretching your shoulders – Making sure, here's a hint, it starts with p, and ends in osture, is upright, clasp your hands together by interlocking your fingers behind your lower back. Without leaning forward and keeping your arms straight and locked together, try to raise your arms up behind your back as high as you can go. This stretch will hit your shoulders and your pectorals.

Stretching your erector spinae – because you're spine has been in the flexed position as you're hunched over the keyboard, we need to incorporate some back extension. Ideally, you would do this lying on your stomach and pushing your upperbody off the ground. However, sometimes in an office, this possibly isn't the most convenient of stretches. So, place your hands in the small of your back, keeping your core muscles activated, and gently lean backwards. Additionally, we can add the stretch that Aussie cricketing legend, Merv Hughes made famous, the lateral back stretch. Clasp your hands over your head, standing up tall, lean to the side until you feel a stretch down one side of your body. Make sure you follow the line of your body and that you don't lean forward or backwards.

Stretching your hip flexors – The flexibility in your work attire may cause restrictions with this stretch, so be careful, I don't want you to have to dust off the sewing machine. Assume a staggered stance. Keep your rear leg straight, and start to bend your front leg by dropping your hips towards the ground until you start to feel a stretch in your hip flexors. To increase the stretch keep the same position, but push your hips forwards at the same time. Change legs, and stretch out the other side.

Stretching you hamstrings – Keeping your body square, place one heel in front of you, preferably on something that's higher than ground level. For example, a chair, step or that massive stack of files that have overflowed from your inbox and onto the floor. Keep a slight bend in both knees and lean forward from the hips, keeping your core activated, and your chest out. To gain more of a nerve stretch, and to hit your calves slightly as well, straighten your front leg.

If you, like Jon, are experiencing pain from endless hours at the computer desk, make sure you take a breather, move around, and incorporate these simple stretches into your daily routine at the office. You will really notice the positive difference in your comfort levels at work, and you may even be more productive, which is a great selling point to the boss. Plus, remember, that if sitting all day is creating pain, this is always going to have an adverse effect on your training, and while you may try and sell the idea to your boss as a productive exercise, deep down we all know that it's so you can still put in those quality training hours. If you still feel like you're struggling, then best you make an appointment with one of your practitioners to help loosen up those tightened muscles.