

Dental Hygiene

Focus: Repetitive Strain Injuries

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Take Care of Yourself So You Can Continue to Take Care of Others

Tips to incorporate movement into your day to prevent injury

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I think we can all agree that the focus of the dental hygiene profession is prevention. Why is it then that so many dental hygienists neglect to take the time to incorporate stretching and movement into their days to prevent repetitive strain injuries? Deepak Chopra said it best: “If you don’t take care of your health today, you will be forced to take care of your illness tomorrow.”

Maintaining overall health is critical to deterring work-related injury. Movement is easier to integrate into your day than you think. Start small with stretches between clients and work your way up to a morning walk or pre-shift workout. My favourite daily stretches are the two wrist stretches and the world’s greatest stretch shown on the next page. The wrist stretches are critical for dental hygienists due to the repetitive motions involved in our work, and the world’s greatest stretch is just an amazing full-body stretch. It is called the world’s greatest for a reason: it targets everything from shoulders to hip flexors to glutes.

I know the thought of exercising scares many people but do not let it intimidate you. If you are new to the world of exercise, there are many effective movements that you can do in the comfort of your own home without any equipment. Start simply with walking either outside or on a treadmill, and then incorporate body weight mobility exercises such as squats, lunges, and wall push-ups. Once you are comfortable with that you can advance to more challenging activities such as jumping jacks, walking lunges, and full-range push-ups.

If you are ready and willing to add equipment to your workout routine, it is important to consult a personal trainer. The main reason for exercising is to prevent injury not to cause one by using improper form or a piece of equipment

incorrectly. Most fitness centres offer personal training packages with the purchase of memberships. However, if you are looking to work out on your own, be sure you hire a personal trainer who is certified by a professional organization such as Canfit Pro or the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM).

To start building your home gym I recommend resistance bands or loops. They can increase the intensity of body weight movements with a minimal increase in the risk of injury. When you are ready to invest in dumbbells, I suggest a set of light (2 lbs to 5 lbs), medium (7 lbs to 10 lbs), and heavy (12 lbs to 15 lbs). You can always purchase heavier weights after you have mastered the form and lift technique with the lighter ones. Not ready to invest in heavier weights? No problem—simply perform more repetitions with the lighter ones to burn out the muscle group.

There is of course more to overall health than exercising. Here are some other wellness tips and tricks to consider.

- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Get a good night’s sleep of 7 to 9 hours if possible.
- Eat nutritious meals and snacks such as vegetable soups, salads with lean protein, smoothies, non-fat Greek yogurt, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.
- See a registered massage therapist regularly.
- Cut out excess sugar by reducing or eliminating pop, energy drinks, iced coffee, and alcoholic beverages.

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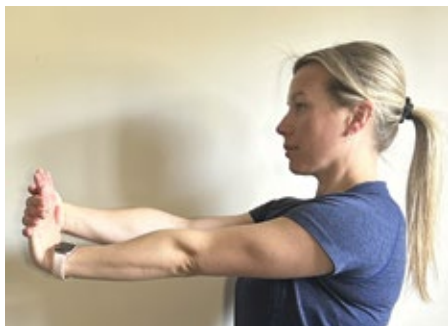
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For more information and helpful tips, CDHA has two great resources:

- Warm-Up and Stretching Exercises, available at cdha.ca/CDHA/The_Profession/Resources/links/Stretching.aspx
- Your Injury Prevention Checklist, available at cdha.ca/CDHA/The_Profession/Resources/links/Ergonomics.aspx

Please remember as dental hygienists we are health care advocates. I hope I have inspired you to take care of your own health needs so that you can have a long and successful career caring for those of others.



WRIST STRETCH 1

- Standing or sitting, extend one arm fully with the palm facing away from you with your fingers pointing up.
- Gently place your opposite hand across the extended palm and pull towards your body until you feel the stretch.
- Hold this position for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.



WRIST STRETCH 2

- Standing or sitting, extend one arm fully with the palm facing towards you and your fingers pointing down.
- Gently place the opposite hand across the back of the flexed hand and pull towards your body until you feel the stretch.
- Hold the position for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Repeat on the other side.



WORLD'S GREATEST STRETCH

- Start in a standing position.
- Walk out to a high plank.
- Step your right foot forward, level with the right hand.
- Lift your right hand, reaching it towards the ceiling.
- Hold the position for 5 to 10 seconds.
- Slowly place your right hand back on the floor.
- Place your right foot next to your left foot.
- Repeat on left side.