Shoulder & Back Stretch

NEW YORK STATE | Office of Mental Health

New York State Trauma-Informed Network & Resource Center

ABOUT THIS TOOL

Audience
Onsite Construction and Utility Workers

Description
This quick stretch helps loosen tight shoulders and back muscles during the workday. Construction work often involves lifting, carrying, bending, and repeating the same movements. Over time, this can cause muscles to feel stiff or sore. This simple stretch helps your body relax, improves movement, and can make it easier to keep working safely and comfortably.

When to Use
Use this stretch when your shoulders or back feel tight, sore, or stiff. It is especially helpful after lifting heavy items, carrying materials, or doing the same motion for a long time. You can also use it during short breaks to prevent discomfort before it starts.

WORKPLACE STRESS

Stress is your body's response to pressure, and construction and utility work has plenty of it. Long hours, heavy labor, bad weather, heights, and tight deadlines.

Stress often shows up physically before anything else. Common signs include constant fatigue, headaches, tight or sore muscles, poor sleep, low energy, and slower reaction time. These signals are easy to ignore, but they're your body's warning that something needs to change.

THE PRACTICE

Stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart.

- Slowly roll your shoulders backward 5 times, moving in a smooth and controlled way.
- Clasp your hands together and stretch your arms up over your head.
- Hold the stretch for about **10 seconds** while breathing slowly.
- Gently twist your upper body to the left, then to the right.
- Move slowly and only go as far as feels comfortable—do not force the stretch.

WHY THIS HELPS

Managing stress matters because high stress increases accident risk, slows work, and harms long-term health. Pay attention to early signs, take short breaks, use simple breathing, and talk with a trusted coworker or supervisor. Taking care of yourself on the job site is part of doing the job well.

WHY THIS WORKS

Stretching helps increase blood flow to your muscles, which brings in oxygen and helps them recover. It reduces muscle tightness and can improve how well your body moves. Regular stretching can help prevent strains and sprains, especially in jobs that require lifting and repeated motion. Taking a minute to stretch can help you feel better and lower the risk of injury on the job.

Resources:
Find additional wellness information on the NYS Trauma Informed Network and Resource Center at traumainformedny.org
Looking to go deeper? Explore BREATH-BODY-MIND™ (BBM) for weekly breathwork practice, expert tips, and a welcoming community. Check out the website here for additional details.

Sources:
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). (2020). *Construction Ergonomics and Musculoskeletal Disorder Prevention.*
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). *Preventing Musculoskeletal Disorders in Construction.*