

## Ergonomics for Educators

Teaching and preparing lessons can mean long hours of sitting, standing, and reaching. These simple posture and movement strategies help reduce fatigue, ease muscle tension, and keep your back, neck, and shoulders healthy throughout the school day.

### Why Ergonomics Matters

Good ergonomics means setting up your workspace to fit your body — not forcing your body to adapt to your workspace. Even small adjustments can make a big difference in your comfort, focus, and energy.

### Classroom & Desk Setup Basics

- Keep your knees, hips, and elbows at roughly 90 degrees when seated.
- Sit back in your chair with feet flat on the floor (or on a small footrest).
- Position your monitor or laptop so the top of the screen is at or slightly below eye level.
- Use a document holder if you frequently grade or read papers.
- Keep frequently used items (like pens, phone, or mouse) within easy reach.

### Movement & Posture Reminders

- Take a short standing or walking break every 30–45 minutes.
- Practice small posture resets — gently draw your shoulder blades together, or do a few chin tucks.
- Use your ‘2-Minute Movement Breaks’ like the Seated and Standing Back Routines.
- When standing at the board, shift your weight between feet and avoid leaning on one hip.

### Gentle Self-Care Reminders

- Breathe deeply — inhale through your nose, exhale slowly through your mouth to release tension.
- Stretch your arms overhead and roll your shoulders a few times between classes.
- Stay hydrated — even mild dehydration can increase fatigue.
- Use breaks to move, not just to check your phone or email.

### Quick Ergonomic Checklist

- ☒ My monitor is at or slightly below eye level.
- ☒ My feet are flat on the floor or supported.
- ☒ My chair supports my lower back.
- ☒ I take short breaks to stretch or walk every 30–45 minutes.
- ☒ My shoulders feel relaxed, not hunched.
- ☒ I use both hands when carrying heavy items like books or supplies.
- ☒ I vary my posture throughout the day (sit, stand, move).

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## Ergonomics & Movement Checklist

Use this checklist to stay comfortable, energized, and pain-free throughout your teaching day. Small posture adjustments and movement breaks can make a big difference in how you feel.

### Posture & Setup Check

- ☒ My chair supports my lower back.
- ☒ My feet are flat on the floor or supported by a footrest.
- ☒ My screen is at or slightly below eye level.
- ☒ My shoulders are relaxed and my elbows are close to my sides.
- ☒ I use a document holder or keep papers at a comfortable height when grading.

### Movement Habits

- ☒ I take a standing or walking break every 30–45 minutes.
- ☒ I stretch or roll my shoulders between classes.
- ☒ I change positions (sit, stand, move) throughout the day.
- ☒ I do short “2-Minute Movement Breaks” from the back routines.

### Energy & Self-Care

- ☒ I take slow, deep breaths during stressful moments.
- ☒ I drink water regularly during the day.
- ☒ I notice tension and gently reset my posture.
- ☒ I end the day with one stretch to unwind.

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Check in with yourself daily — posture, breathing, and movement all work together to support your health and energy.

## Seated Back Routine

This routine helps ease stiffness, improve posture, and support back comfort — all from a seated position. Move slowly and breathe deeply through each exercise. Stop if you feel any pain or discomfort.

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### 1. Seated Cat-Cow

Purpose: Improves spinal mobility, posture, and circulation.

How to do it:

- Sit toward the front of your chair with feet flat and knees at hip-width.
- Place your hands on your thighs.
- Inhale as you gently arch your back, lifting your chest and looking slightly upward (Cow position).
- Exhale as you round your spine, drawing your belly button toward your spine and tucking your chin (Cat position).
- Move slowly and smoothly between the two positions, focusing on gentle movement through each vertebra.

Hold/Repeat: 8–10 slow cycles of breath.

Modification: If your shoulders or neck feel tight, keep your gaze neutral and focus on moving your spine.

### 2. Seated Spinal Twist

Purpose: Encourages healthy spinal rotation and relieves mid-back tension.

How to do it:

- Sit tall with both feet grounded.
- Place your right hand on the back of the chair and your left hand on your right thigh.
- Inhale to lengthen your spine; exhale and gently rotate your torso to the right.
- Keep your hips facing forward and shoulders relaxed.
- Look over your right shoulder if comfortable.

Hold/Repeat: Hold 20–30 seconds per side. Repeat 2–3 times each side.

Modification: If your chair has armrests, hold the sides of the seat instead of twisting deeply.

### 3. Seated Side Bend

Purpose: Lengthens the sides of the body and improves lateral spinal flexibility.

How to do it:

- Sit tall with both feet flat and your spine straight.

- Place your left hand on the seat beside you for support.
- Inhale and raise your right arm overhead.
- Exhale and gently lean to the left, keeping both sit bones on the chair.
- Feel a stretch along your right side from your ribs to your hip.
- Return to center and switch sides.

Hold/Repeat: Hold 20–30 seconds each side. Repeat once per side.

Modification: If lifting the arm overhead is uncomfortable, keep your hand on your hip.

#### 4. Seated Knee-to-Chest Stretch

Purpose: Relieves pressure in the lower back and stretches the glutes and hips.

How to do it:

- Sit tall with both feet flat.
- Bring your right knee up toward your chest, clasping your hands gently around it.
- Inhale to lengthen your spine; exhale and draw the knee slightly closer.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and back straight.
- Lower the leg slowly and switch sides.

Hold/Repeat: Hold 20–30 seconds per leg. Repeat twice each side.

Modification: If it's difficult to lift the leg, place your hands behind the thigh instead of over the knee.

#### 5. Shoulder Roll & Chest Opener

Purpose: Loosens tension in the upper back and shoulders while improving posture.

How to do it:

- Sit or stand tall with your spine straight.
- Roll your shoulders slowly up, back, and down in a circular motion 5–8 times.
- Interlace your fingers behind your back (or hold the edges of the chair if mobility is limited).
- Inhale and gently lift your chest, drawing your shoulder blades together.
- Keep your chin level and avoid dropping your head back.
- Exhale and relax.

Hold/Repeat: Hold open position 15–20 seconds; repeat shoulder rolls 2–3 times.

Modification: If clasping your hands isn't comfortable, place palms on lower back and lift chest instead.

#### ---Quick Tips

- Breathe deeply and move at a calm, steady pace.
- Focus on how your body feels — not how far you move.
- Perform daily or whenever you feel stiff from sitting.

## Healthy Backs: Floor-Based Movement Routine

This gentle routine promotes flexibility, mobility, and back comfort. Each movement can be adjusted to fit your body's needs. Move slowly, breathe deeply, and focus on ease rather than effort.

### 1. Cat–Cow Stretch (on Hands and Knees)

Purpose: Improves spinal mobility and helps relieve back tension.

How to Do It:

1. Begin on hands and knees with your hands under shoulders and knees under hips.
2. Inhale as you gently arch your back, lifting your chest and tailbone toward the ceiling (Cow).
3. Exhale as you round your spine, tucking your chin and tailbone toward each other (Cat).
4. Continue moving slowly with your breath.

Hold / Repeat: 8–10 slow rounds

Tips:

- Keep the motion smooth and relaxed.
- Press lightly into the floor to support your shoulders.
- Focus on how your spine feels, not how far you move.

Modifications:

- If wrists are sore, rest on your forearms instead of hands.
- Place a folded towel or blanket under your knees for comfort.
- If kneeling isn't comfortable, do the same movement seated — hands on your knees, rounding and arching your back gently.

### 2. Bird Dog (Opposite Arm and Leg Reach)

Purpose: Builds strength and stability through your core and back.

How to Do It:

1. Begin on hands and knees.
2. Extend your right arm forward and your left leg back, keeping your hips level.
3. Hold for a few seconds, then return to center.
4. Switch sides and repeat.

Hold / Repeat: 8–10 reps on each side

Tips:

- Keep your neck in line with your spine — look down at the floor.
- Reach long through your arm and leg, rather than lifting high.
- Move slowly to stay balanced.

## Healthy Backs Floor-Based Movement Routine with Modifications

Modifications:

- For balance support, extend just one leg or one arm at a time.
- For shoulder comfort, keep both knees down and move only your arm.

### 3. Glute Bridge (Supine Hip Lift)

Purpose: Strengthens the glutes and supports a healthy lower back.

How to Do It:

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
2. Press through your heels and gently lift your hips toward the ceiling.
3. Hold briefly, then lower slowly to the floor.

Hold / Repeat: 10–12 reps

Tips:

- Keep your ribs relaxed and your core gently engaged.
- Avoid arching your lower back.
- Squeeze your glutes to assist the lift.

Modifications:

- Move your feet slightly away from your body if your hips feel tight.
- If lifting is difficult, try a tuck and tilt of the pelvis.

### 4. Knees-to-Chest Stretch

Purpose: Relaxes the lower back and releases hip tension.

How to Do It:

1. Lie on your back with legs extended.
2. Bring one knee toward your chest, holding behind your thigh or shin.
3. Keep your shoulders relaxed and the other leg resting on the floor.
4. Hold, then switch sides. You can also hug both knees in together if comfortable.

Hold / Repeat: Hold each leg 20–30 seconds

Tips:

- Keep breathing deeply.
- Relax your neck and shoulders.
- Let gravity assist the stretch — avoid pulling too hard.

Modifications:

- Hold behind your thigh instead of your shin if you feel tightness.
- Use a strap or towel around your leg if reaching is difficult.
- If getting to the floor is uncomfortable, try this stretch in bed.

### 5. Reclined Spinal Twist (Supine Twist)

Purpose: Improves spinal rotation and helps ease lower back tightness.

## Healthy Backs Floor-Based Movement Routine with Modifications

### How to Do It:

1. Lie on your back with arms open in a 'T' position.
2. Bring your knees toward your chest, then slowly let them fall to one side.
3. Turn your head gently in the opposite direction.
4. Breathe deeply, then switch sides.

Hold / Repeat: Hold 30 seconds per side

### Tips:

- Keep your shoulders grounded.
- Let the movement feel relaxed, not forced.
- Move slowly back to center between sides.

### Modifications:

- Keep arms closer to your body if shoulders feel tight.
- Try a smaller twist — even partial movement helps increase flexibility.